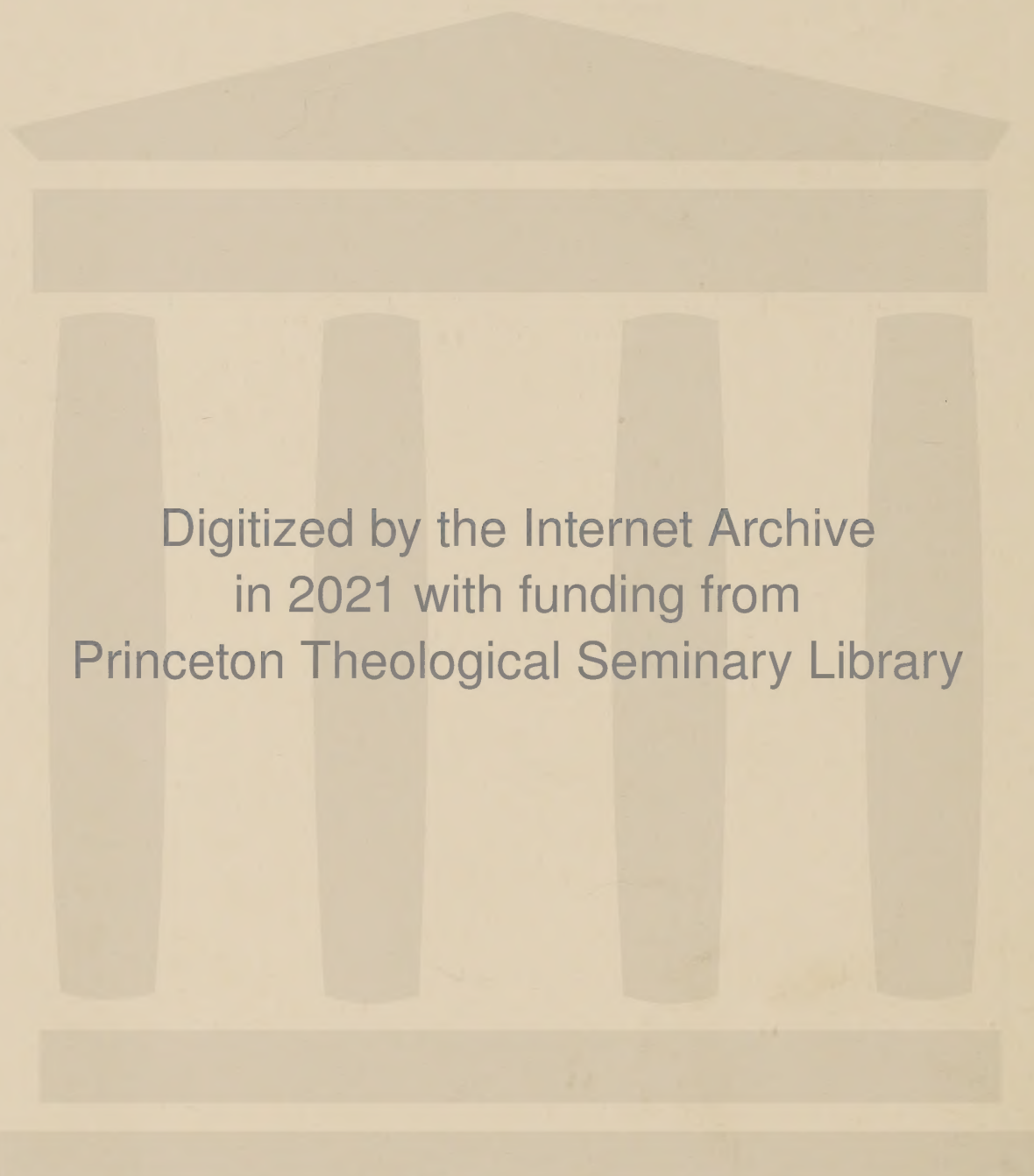


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The Princeton Theological Review

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that the light of God's truth may shine bright and increase

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*Stand at the crossroads and look
Ask for the old paths, where the good way is
Walk in it, and find rest for your souls*

JEREMIAH 6:16

The Princeton Theological Review

Dedicated to the Rev. Dr. Charles Hodge (1797-1878)

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Letters

Dear Bill,

Thanks for sending me a copy of the *PRINCETON REVIEW*. . . .

I have to give a great big thumbs up to Ray Cannata. His piece was absolutely on the money and I urge him to write a book on old Princeton. He is unquestionably the most able person for such a task. . . .

[Paul LaMontagne's] suggestion that Barthians and Old Princeton are allies ignores all reality. The first response to his paper [Jay Richard's] hit the nail on the head: epistemology is the key.

I liked the piece by [Chad Pecknold]. He demonstrated a good grasp of the big picture of philosophical history and how postmodernism factors in. He seems like an ex-philosophy major. . . .

I know the liberals are throwing spears at you. I appreciate your bravery and your determination. . . .

Just one suggestion: Advertise the Grace of God a little more in your journal. Don't sacrifice the beauty of Reformed theology for the sake of being intellectual. I didn't read any articles about the goodness of God's mercy. . . . Face it: Grace is still winsome!!

Rick Gardiner
[former editor of the PTR]

To the Editors:

The last "double issue" of the *Princeton Theological Review* is more than doubly problematic. I do not have time to rehearse and assess all the problems that are so evident, but I offer these four points.

First, I am referred to in William A. Dembski's essay as offering courses in which "you'll get a post-structural perspective." I do not even recognize that as a description of my theological or pedagogical approaches. I have taught post-structuralism, but that does not make the course of mine "post-structural." Someone who takes the time to read my texts might note that, in fact, I offer vigorous critiques of both "post-structuralism" and "postmodernism." If you wish to characterize my work and teaching, try emphasizing that in all my courses and theological writings I aim to offer a theology of "integral liberation." To know what "integral liberation" is would require talking to me, something which Dembski did not bother to do before characterizing my course "perspective."

Second, in Dembski's other article on "The Paradox of Politicizing the Kingdom of God," it is unclear as to whether he is talking about any real scholar, or just an imagined one. Who in fact does he mean who would embrace an understanding of the kingdom of God in "purely sociopolitical terms"? Liberation theologian Gutiérrez, whom Dembski cites, is by Dembski's own admission not fairly typified as offering a "purely political point of view." And of course Aristotle, as again Dembski acknowledges, is no such a reductionist. So, then, about whom is Dembski writing?

Third, the essay offered by the editors, written by Chad Clifford Pecknold on "Postmodernism at a Glance," is not

only a glancing view, it is misleading. I refer briefly to several problems. To characterize the "traditional" as offering only a "conservative" mode overlooks the revolutionary potential of traditions. To characterize the modern as having its center in "data" overlooks the complex understandings of the relationship of data to subjectivity and to communities of inquiry, as many scientists themselves would recognize. The "rock musician" is hardly the only or primary "symbol" of the "postmodern," nor is it accurate to say that there is simply "no center" to the "postmodern," as even Jacques Derrida, the great deconstructionist himself, would emphasize. Further, the granting of a separate column to "gospel" as over and against the "postmodern," the "modern" and the "traditional" is misleading at best, and certainly warrants more careful reflection. Mr. Pecknold and the Editors, in order to orient themselves about the important currents of postmodern thought, would do well to read the essay by Andreas Huyssen, "Mapping the Postmodern," in Linda Nicholson, ed., *Feminism/Postmodernism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 234 to 277.

Finally, I do want to congratulate the editors on including in their magazine the fine formulation of an important Christological question of our era. This occurs on page 42 of the "double issue," in the article, "The Virgin Birth at PTS—Now and Then." After summarizing part of Don Capps' argument concerning the "illegitimacy of Jesus" and the way that enriches an understanding of God's revelation in Jesus Christ, the writers formulate the following:

"Question: How can an individual whose identity is wholly determined by the 'awareness of being an illegitimate child' be the savior of the world, much less God in the flesh?"

I would respond first to the editors' question by saying in faith "with God all things are possible." As theologian, I would also say that great inspiration awaits all of us in the Christian community and in our country, if we think deeply about God's having selected a child whom the world deems "illegitimate," and who was born to an unmarried woman downtrodden in her time. Is the editors' faith large enough to embrace this miracle? Legends about figures come to earth by virgin birth are many; but the miracle of God in the flesh, in the form of a child born of an unmarried woman's union (however it happened!), is marvelous indeed.

The *Review* trumpets on its front page a concern "that the light of God's truth may shine bright and increase." Even after a "double issue," I'm still waiting for that light to be ably served by *The Review*.

Sincerely,
Mark McLain-Taylor
[letter reprinted in full]

What is the importance of the virgin birth? . . . The question is obviously important for the general question of the authority of the Bible. It is perfectly clear that the New Testament teaches the virgin birth of Christ. . . . The only question is whether in making that representation the Bible is true or false.

—J. Gresham Machen

From the Editors

Good-Bye and Welcome

The editors wish to thank Bill Dembski and Brian Frederick for their faithful service on behalf of the Charles Hodge Society and as editors of the PTR. Bill is going to Notre Dame as a visiting scholar in the Center for Philosophy of Religion and Brian will be staying in the Princeton area for a time. Congratulations to both Bill and Brian as they graduate with their M.Div.'s this month.

Replacing Bill as managing editor in the fall will be Tony Hinchliff, who was on leave from the seminary last year doing a church internship. Replacing Brian as book review editor in the fall will be Chad Pecknold. Also in the fall we shall be adding a culture and arts editor. Jana Van Gorp will assume this role.

Call for Articles & Letters

The PTR seeks substantive, well-reasoned articles on topics of general theological interest. Under this rubric we include theology, philosophy, science, literary theory, history, and indeed any discipline that touches significantly on theology.

What Apologetics is Not

It is ironic that apologetics, the very discipline by which the church has traditionally defended its most holy faith, must in our day itself be defended. The Charles Hodge Society defends the discipline of Christian apologetics through its apologetics seminar and the *Princeton Theological Review*. Nor do we stop here. Not only do we defend the apologetic task, but we actually attempt to do apologetics. If our attempts are at times feeble, it is at least in part due to the sheer neglect with which the apologetic task has been treated in the last fifty years.

Despite our best efforts, many continue to exhibit discomfort and confusion over the word *apologetics*. Particularly in Reformed institutions where the influence of Karl Barth is strong, the discipline is often charged with being disreputable, unhelpful, and even downright hostile to the gospel. The idea that defending Christian truth-claims could somehow conflict with the claims of the gospel is highly counterintuitive to most outside seminaries and divinity schools. Nonetheless, the anti-apologetic bias that permeates the seminaries and divinity schools these days has some legitimate basis. Let us therefore clarify what we mean by *apologetics*, in particular by specifying *what it is not*.

Because of the penchant of Protestants since the 18th century to accommodate to the wiles of their host culture, particularly in academic circles, the antipathy some feel toward positive apologetics is understandable. In the eyes of some, apologetics is synonymous with *accommodationism*. Paul Tillich might be a good example of the accommodationist approach. Tillich sought, by an analysis of contemporary questions and concerns, to "correlate" the claims of the gospel to function as appropriate answers to these questions. While his approach is to be sure more nuanced, it is not hard to see where this strategy is likely to end up. Correlation can easily function as justification to whittle away at the stark contrasts, the prophetic edge, the

surprise and the offense of the gospel. More deceptively, an enculturated gospel can style itself as a prophetic voice, but wear the red of Bolshevism instead of the crimson of the cross. It's very easy for a Spirit of the Age to hijack the distinctiveness of the gospel. What if the prevailing assumptions of a culture are hostile to any honest presentation of the gospel? What if the burning questions a culture raises are purely self-serving, and evince no interest in the transcendent? Is it easy to "correlate," say, Christ's execution on a cross for our sins with getting in touch with one's inner child? Probably not. The gospel might even need to function as a rebuke against such navel-gazing. However we resolve this, the point is clear: *Apologetics must zealously eschew accommodationism*.

Some critics say more. They identify the very practice of apologetics with a tacit act of idolatry. The apologist is said to ignore God's self-revelation, to pretend to doubt it and even to accept the premises of skeptics and seekers in order to "win them over." Moreover, since there are no premises that everyone is willing to accept that can *prove* the truth of Christianity, apologetics is futile. "If you do not start by presupposing its truth," so the critic charges, "you will never get there by argumentation." While these charges bear close scrutiny and a more sustained response, we would like here simply to offer a few modest points. The apologist is *not* committed to pretending that he or she does not accept the truth of God's self-revelation in Scripture and Jesus Christ, nor that he or she is a Christian *on the basis of* some one or another apologetic argument. Nor need the apologist pretend to adopt the premises of the unbeliever. The apologist need not start from premises *every* reasonable person must accept, and need not claim deductively to *prove* the truth of some Christian truth. Deductive proof is too stringent a criterion for such things.

The apologist might start from a premise shared with the audience, or with a fairly plausible presupposition such as a moral intuition about human rights. The fact that God has revealed himself in Christ neither implies nor entails that there are no good arguments for the truth of the gospel, or that we are impious if we employ such arguments. After all, the editorial staff of the *Review* claims among its own some whom God chose to call *by means of* apologetic arguments.

While skeptics and enemies of the faith have no scruples about attempting to discredit Christian truth claims, too many inside the faith are busy thinking of excuses for why we should not respond to them. There are some legitimate theological worries that apologetics not become accommodationism; but too often such concerns function as an *immunization strategy* for Christians who grow queasy at the thought of defending the truth of Christian beliefs. Anyone can make bare assertions; but sincere belief should issue in articulate defense. And (dare we say it), might there be a little embarrassment on the part of some who avoid defending the faith, because, well, one doesn't defend what one doesn't believe?

Christ has commanded us to love the Lord our God with our whole *minds* (Luke 10:27); and 1 Peter says: "Always be prepared to give an answer (*apologia*) to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (3:15). May the Lord raise up a legion who are so prepared.

Is Barth a Universalist?

Gregory E. Valeriano

A re-occurring criticism of the theology of Karl Barth is that of the doctrine of universal salvation (apokatastasis), even in the face of his blatant rejection of this doctrine. The question then is whether or not Barth is being consistent with his own theology when he denies the doctrine of universalism or has his theology been misunderstood. This paper is an attempt to answer this question. Though Barth discusses universalism under other doctrines (i.e., reconciliation), the discussion of this paper will center around his doctrine of election.

Barth argues that election and the Gospel are one and the same. Election means the freedom of God's love to elect humanity in the electing and elected person of Jesus of Nazareth. By nature of his primal decision, God has chosen to be in relationship with humanity. From all eternity God chose, before any other decision, in his freedom, to be merciful to humanity. This free primal decision knows no Wherefore. It is an absolute Therefore, the ultimate Therefore of all.¹ This is the beginning of all grace: God's primal and free decision to condescend himself so that he can uplift humanity and be in relationship with humanity.

However, this freedom is not an arbitrary act of will by God. If this were so then it would be hard to distinguish between his freedom and caprice. God would be nothing more than a tyrant living by His own whim and assertion. Against this notion of freedom, Jesus Christ must be the starting point. That is, the starting point must be the divine choice or election as the decision to elect humanity in Jesus Christ. God's freedom is true freedom and it is absolute. However, it is not an abstract or arbitrary freedom, but a freedom that loves in freedom.²

The ground of God's election in freedom is love. God is not love because he chooses to elect humanity. To the contrary, God is love in that he exists as Trinity in perfect love. He needs no other to exist in freedom and love. His love for humanity, rooted in the consistent love of his being as Trinity, is a love that is *ad extra*. God needs no other. There is no influence outside of God which can determine or condition God's love in freedom. If this were so then God would not be free, God would not be God. God is a God who loves in freedom. God elects in love and freedom.

Election means that in this act of freedom, God, by no outside influence, chose to be in relationship with humanity by virtue of electing humanity in Jesus Christ.

What else can this be but grace? What else can this be but the very Gospel itself? For Barth the doctrine of election (or predestination) is the Gospel. In this God has done something which he is not constrained to do but in doing constrains himself. In this he chooses to be in relationship with the other that stands against him. God has spoken an eternal Yes to humanity by his love in freedom. This eternal Yes is not a No and Yes to humanity. It is not a message of both joy and terror. It is God's gracious Yes to humanity. Barth writes:

The truth of the doctrine of predestination, is first and last and in all circumstances the sum of the Gospel. It is itself evangel: glad tiding It is not a mixed message of joy and terror, salvation and damnation. It does not proclaim in the same breath both good and evil, both help and destruction, both life and death.³

Election (predestination) has only to do with the merciful self-determination of God toward humanity in Jesus Christ. The doctrine of election tells us about God as being a gracious God. This is not to say that there is no judgment in election. There is a shadow and Barth certainly does not want to ignore this shadow. For Barth, "the Yes cannot be heard unless the No is also heard. But the No is said for the sake of the Yes and not for its own sake. Therefore, for Barth, the first and last word is Yes and not No."⁴ Election is the Gospel and the Gospel is God's decision before all other decisions to love in freedom *ad extra*, electing all of humanity to be in relationship with Himself in Jesus Christ.

Barth stands against any notion of the hidden will of God. There is no *deus absconditus* for Barth. There is no hidden will behind the will of God to be for humanity. We know the will of God because it is revealed in the act of Jesus Christ being for humanity. This is what Barth means by starting with Jesus Christ as our starting point for understanding the mystery of election. There is no hidden will behind the revealed will of God electing

humanity in Jesus Christ. For Barth, the foundation of election is Christ.

By stating the foundation of election to be Jesus Christ, Barth is criticizing other traditions that have sought elsewhere to ground this doctrine. He criticizes modern Calvinism for starting with an already set system and he criticizes Augustine for starting with experience (why do some believe and others do not?). For Barth, the starting point must be Scripture, not a system and not experience. Scripture, Barth states, unequivocally points us to the

It is urged that it cannot be consistent with the justice of God to inflict a really infinite penalty on such a creature as man. It is very obvious to remark on this subject that we are incompetent judges of the penalty which sin deserves. We have no adequate apprehension of its inherent guilt, of the dignity of the person against whom it is committed, or of the extent of the evil which it is suited to produce. The proper end of punishment is retribution and prevention. What is necessary for that end, God only knows; and, therefore, the penalty which He imposes on sin is the only just measure of its ill desert.

—Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*

person of Jesus Christ. If we want to know who and what is the God to be known, then Scripture points us to only one person and that is Jesus Christ. If we want to know the will of God toward humanity, then we can only start by His self-revelation in Jesus Christ. Scripture points us to Christ as the foundation of election. Barth states it this way:

If we would know who God is, and what is the meaning and purpose of His election, and in what respect the electing God, then we must look away from all others, and excluding all side-glances of secondary thoughts, we must look only upon and to the name of Jesus Christ. . . .⁵

It is at this point that Barth thinks the Reformation dropped the ball. Calvin and the Reformed tradition realized the deep connection between Christ and the doctrine of election. However, Barth believes they never really followed through with this notion and this has serious pastoral implications. For Barth, election is election in Jesus Christ. If we want to know God's attitude toward us all we need to do is look to the person of Jesus Christ. From that we know that God says a merciful Yes to humanity, that he brings humanity into relationship with himself. As we have seen, the doctrine of election is the sum of the Gospel and this makes it possible to speak of the comfort of election. If there are any questions about our status before God then we must look to the revelation in Christ to see that God is for humanity.

For Barth, the problem with Calvin and the Reformed tradition is that their belief in the hidden will and decree of God dismantles the comfort that is found in the doctrine of election. On the one hand, they wanted to speak of our election in Christ and point to Him for assurance of salvation. But on the other hand, they taught the hidden will and decree of God which has determined before all time some to be saved and some to be damned. This hidden will relativizes the comfort of election, for ultimately our election is not in the Yes of Jesus Christ but in the hidden will of God. If this will and decree, which decides the fate of each human, is hidden then we can never be sure of our election by the very fact that it is hidden and not revealed. Ultimately, we just do not know God and His will toward us. Barth writes:

When the question of decree which is absolute in this sense crops up again, what an abyss of uncertainty is opened up! The thought election becomes necessarily the thought of the will and decision of God which are hidden somewhere in the heights and depths behind Jesus Christ and behind God's revelation. The first and last question in respect of the relationship between God and man brings us face to face with a God who is above and beyond Jesus Christ and with a relationship which is independent of Jesus Christ. . . . How, then, can we have any sure knowledge of this relationship? How can

we be certain that it is good to be so fully in the hands of God as we are proclaimed to be when we assert that God elects?⁶

Barth adamantly opposes any hidden will of God, for it places a will before and other than what is revealed in the revelation of Jesus Christ. Barth argues that we know of no election outside of Jesus Christ and his election for us. If we are elected in Christ then we cannot look elsewhere to understand what it means to be elect. Indeed, Jesus Christ is the foundation of election. At this point, the idea that Christ is the foundation of election needs to be fleshed out.

Jesus Christ is the foundation because he is the electing God and the elected man. Jesus Christ is the Subject and the Object of election. Jesus Christ, by being the electing God and the elected

[Socrates speaking:] In the days of Cronos there existed a law respecting the destiny of man, which has always been, and still continues to be in Heaven—that he who has lived all his life in justice and holiness shall go, when he is dead, to the Islands of the Blessed, and dwell there in perfect happiness out of the reach of evil; but that he who has lived unjustly and impiously shall go to the house of vengeance and punishment, which is called Tartarus.

—Plato, *Gorgias*

man, is the mediator between God and man. This is no abstraction. He is the beginning of all God's ways and works with humanity.

Jesus is the electing God in that He elects to be God in a particular way. That is, Jesus Christ even as God is elected by God the Father to be the electing God the Son. This is to say, that from all eternity the Father chose the Son and the Son chose to be obedient to the Father to be the electing God. The election of Christ, the Word of God that is God, is closely intertwined with Christ the elector. Barth states it this way:

It is true that as the Son of God given by the Father to be one with man, and to take to himself the form of man, He is elected. It is also true that He does not elect alone, but in the company with the electing Father and the Holy Spirit. But he does elect. The obedience which he renders as the Son of God is, as genuine obedience, His own decision and electing, a decision and electing no less divinely free than the electing and decision of the Father and the Holy Spirit. Even the fact that He is elected corresponds as closely as possible to His own electing. In the harmony of the triune God He is no less the original Subject of this electing than he is its original object.⁷

Jesus Christ is the elected and the electing God in his eternal decision with the Father and the Holy Spirit to be such as God. He is the electing God in that he elected, in obedience to the Father, to be elected to manifest God's election of humanity. He is the eternal Subject in that he elects to be elected, thus making Him the object of election, and in that he elects humanity to be in relation with God. Jesus as the elector is primarily His divine determination. He elects to be both the Subject and Object of election, in unity with the Father and the Holy Spirit, electing humanity to be in relationship with God.

Jesus Christ is also the elected man and as man he is

primarily the Object of God's election. The Son of God chose from all eternity to be the Electing God in the man of Jesus Christ. From all eternity God chose Jesus of Nazareth as the object of election in which humanity would be elected. Barth writes:

... Before all created reality, before all being and becoming in time, before time itself, in the pre-temporal eternity of God, the eternal divine decision as such has as its object and content the existence of this one created being, the man Jesus of Nazareth, and the work of this man in His life and death, His humiliation and exaltation, His obedience and merit. It tells us further that in and with the existence of this man the eternal divine decision has as its object and content the execution of the divine covenant with man, the salvation of all man.⁸

Jesus Christ as man is the elect before all the elect. He does not stand side by side with the rest of the elect. He is the elect, before all the elect, in whom the rest of the elect are elected in. The person of Jesus Christ is the Electing God and the elected man. Because Jesus is the electing God we know that Jesus the elected man is the one who stands above all the rest and has the power and authority to be the head of all humanity. From this we know that he has the power and authority for us to be elected in Him.⁹

What does it mean to be elect in Jesus Christ? First, it means that predestination (election) is always and everywhere the acceptance and reception of humanity only by the free grace of God. Even in the man of Jesus of Nazareth there was no merit which could precede His election. It is by grace alone that he is the Son of God. God has no need to be someone outside Himself. The elect man of Jesus Christ is the overflowing of his glory, it is a work *ad extra*. Therefore, like Jesus of Nazareth, we are elected by grace alone. As he became Christ, so we become Christians.¹⁰

Second, the election of Jesus Christ means that He is elected to death and suffering. In this death and suffering God places Himself in the place of sinful humanity. He places Himself at the head and in the place of his enemy (fallen humanity) and takes the judgment and wrath of God upon Himself. Barth writes:

... God must and will reject man as he is in himself. And he does so. But he does it in the person of the elected man Jesus. And in Him He loves man as he is in himself. He elects Jesus, then at the head and in the place of all others. The wrath of God, the judgment and the penalty fall, then, upon him. And this means upon His own Son, upon Himself: upon Him, and not upon those whom he loves and elects "in Him."¹¹

Third, the election of Jesus the man means Jesus is faithful to God and God is faithful to the man Jesus. God is faithful to Jesus in that even in His wrath upon Jesus He is merciful and loving to Jesus. Jesus the man is obedient to God. He is obedient even to the point of death on a cross

where He takes upon himself the wrath of God. "It is the unity of this steadfastness both divine and human that we shall find the peculiar secret of the election of the man Jesus. In this twofold steadfastness there is to be seen both glorifying of God and also the salvation of men, the two things which constitute the aim and meaning of the covenant willed by God, and the election of this man." In this steadfastness our election is made real, it is actualized and concrete. To be elect is to give honor and praise, because of his steadfastness. To be elect is to believe in the resurrection of Jesus the Word of God which has occurred because of the steadfastness of God.¹²

At this point, it is necessary to look, briefly, at Barth's discussion of the Calvinistic debate between the supralapsarians and the infralapsarians. This will bring into focus what has already been said so far about Jesus Christ as the starting point of the doctrine of election and how this

relates to the Calvinistic doctrine of double predestination. With this we will be able to see how Barth reinterprets these two doctrines (supralapsarianism and double predestination) in light of His Christological starting point.

The debate between the supralapsarians and infralapsarians evolved around the ordering of God's

decrees. That is, the supralapsarians believed that before the creation and fall, God predestined some to go to heaven and some to go to hell. The infralapsarians believed that after the creation and after the fall God then determined who would go to heaven and who would go to hell. It is not possible nor necessary to go into all the arguments of this debate. Rather, what is necessary is to see, briefly, how Barth fits into this debate.

Barth disagreed vehemently with the presuppositions of both of these views, as we shall see more clearly. However, Barth does think that the supralapsarian view, interpreted in the light of Jesus Christ, is the more adequate view. For the supralapsarian, election (predestination) is the first decision of God. Before all eternity God chose, in order to show His mercy and justice, who would be elect to heaven and who would be elect to perdition. For Barth, like the supralapsarian and unlike the infralapsarian, election is the first (and the last!) word concerning humanity. This has been made clear by Barth's discussion of Jesus Christ as the primal decision, before all decisions, to be the manifestation and revelation of His election for humanity. Barth is a supralapsarian in that he believes that God chose, as far back as God goes into eternity, to elect humanity to be in relationship with Himself.

Barth is a supralapsarian in a new and qualified sense. As we have seen, he repudiates the hidden decree of double predestination to which the Reformed tradition clung (both supra and infralapsarians). The Reformed tradition resorted to this hidden decree, because when they sought to understand the doctrine of election they took their eyes off of Christ and sought to explain it in another way. The result

No saint ... in the course of his religious warfare, was more sensible of the unhappy failure of pious resolves, than Johnson. He said one day, talking to an acquaintance on this subject, "Sir, Hell is paved with good intentions."

—Boswell, *Life of Johnson*

was an unknown God, a God behind the revealed God in Jesus Christ. A God that is ultimately a *deus absconditus* and not a *deus revelatus*, a revealed God. For Barth, predestination hinges upon Christology.

Barth is a supralapsarian in that he agrees with the older Reformed tradition that election is the primal decision of God. There was no decision before this decision. We know that this was the decision because when we look to Christ we can look no farther into the will of God and when we look to Christ we see God's merciful Yes to humanity. By pointing to Christ as the primal decision of God, Barth is not seeking to explain the mystery of election. Certainly election is a mystery, as the Older Reformed tradition pointed out, and it is a mystery that should be looked upon with awe. But it is not a hidden mystery, it is a revealed mystery. The mystery has content and character in that God's decision for humanity had been revealed and made manifest in the Electing and elected person of Jesus Christ. Only if it is a revealed mystery can we truly adore it. For if it were otherwise we would try to make the known unknown as the Reformers sought to do. Barth writes:

For truly to be silent and to humble ourselves and to adore we must know with whom and with what we have to do. The mystery must be manifest to us as such, i.e., it must have a definite character. It must have the power and dignity to provoke in us an equally definite silence and humility and adoration. Otherwise it is inevitable that we ourselves should try to fill the gap, that of ourselves we should try to make known the unknown.¹³

Barth throughout his discussion of election is in constant conversation with the Reformed tradition of Calvin and the Scholastics. As we have just seen he is reinterpreted some of the basic doctrines of this tradition. Thus far, I have placed the Barth against the Older Reformed doctrine of double predestination. However, it would be a mistake to understand Barth as repudiating the doctrine of double predestination. He certainly rejects Augustine's, Calvin's, Luther's, Zwingli's and the Scholastic's understanding of double predestination and interprets it in the light of Jesus Christ.

In Jesus Christ lies the doctrine of double predestination. This means that in Jesus Christ we are both rejected and elected in Him. There is a negative side and a positive side. Negatively, God has elected Himself to be humanity's friend and covenant partner in the suffering of His Son. This means that Jesus Christ bore our

punishment and judgment. In our place Jesus felt the wrath of God for our sins and our rebellion. The No of God is therefore not aimed at humanity. The rejection of God is not of humanity. The No and rejection of God was aimed at Jesus Christ. Because Jesus was the rejected one, we, who should have been rejected, are not rejected. Barth writes:

- Hell will never lack sufficient room to admit the bodies of the damned, since hell is accounted one of the three things that never are satisfied.
- The unhappiness of the damned surpasses all unhappiness of this world.
- Even as in the blessed in heaven there will be most perfect charity, so in the damned there will be the most perfect hate.
- In the lost there will be a succession of punishments, so that the notion of something future remains there, which is the object of fear.
- The disposition of hell will be such as to be adapted to the utmost unhappiness of the damned.

—Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*

... Faith in the divine predestination as such and *per se* means faith in the non-rejection of man, or disbelief in his rejection. Man is not rejected. In God's eternal purpose it is God Himself who is rejected in His Son. The self-giving of God consists, the giving and sending of His Son is fulfilled, in the fact that he is rejected in order that we might not be rejected.¹⁴

This is not to say that we did not deserve rejection. Rather God willed it that we will not be rejected in the rejection of His Son in our place.

Positively, double predestination means that God has elected humanity in Jesus Christ to be covenant partners. This is the positive content of

predestination, the Yes of God to humanity. This is the overflowing of God's glory, his work *ad extra*. God has elected Himself for suffering and rejection and humanity for election. Barth is a double predestinarian but in a radically new sense. It is in Jesus Christ that humanity is rejected and elected. It is in Jesus Christ that God's Yes overcomes His No to humanity. The No of God, the rejecting of humanity, is subsumed under the Yes of God because the Son of God has taken our place as the rejected one.

At this point, we can begin to close in on the question at hand. Is Barth a universalist? Barth's doctrine of election seems to point in the direction of universalism. If all of humanity is elected in Christ by the rejection of Christ in our place this seems to exclude the possibility of any being rejected. Barth even states that because we have been elected in Christ to live any other way is rendered null and void by the work of Christ. To choose to live any other way is impossible. It is an impossible possibility. Barth writes:

In Jesus Christ thou, too, art not rejected—for He has borne thy rejection—but elected. A decision has been made, in Jesus Christ, concerning the futility of thy desire and attempt to live that life; and it has been decided that thou canst live only this other life.¹⁵

If this is true how is the doctrine of *apokatastasis* avoided? How is universalism avoided? First, it must be noted that Barth rejects the doctrine of universalism, though he thinks that it cannot be ruled out totally. Barth leaves

room for the possibility for the salvation of all humanity. It is not conclusive one way or the other, from our point of view, whether God will choose to save all or not.

Barth rejects the doctrine of universalism because it restricts the freedom of God. It does this not so much in that it believes that God must save all of humanity. Rather, for Barth, universalism restricts God's freedom because it assumes that God must save any person. God's plan of salvation is not determined or conditioned by any outside influence. Barth writes:

If we are to respect the freedom of divine grace, we cannot venture the statement that it must and will finally be coincident with the world of man as such (as in the doctrine of the so-called *apodastasis*). No such right or necessity can legitimately be deduced. Just as the gracious God does not need to elect or call any single man, so he does not need to elect or call all mankind.¹⁶

The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

—Matthew 13:47-50

For God to be love does not mean that He must save all or any of humankind. God is love in and of His triune self.

His love and freedom toward humanity come from this triune existence. If God were not love and freedom within Himself, therefore void of any external realities that could determine the love and freedom of God, then God would not be God. God loves in freedom and His love toward humanity is a work *ad extra* that flows from this self-consistent love and freedom.

On the one hand, Barth rejects the doctrine of universalism. On the other hand, He believes that because Christ has taken the punishment for our sins upon Himself, we are no longer under the wrath of God. Indeed, we are therefore elected and the possibility of living as not elected is impossible. Therefore, it seems as if something is missing. Is Barth's understanding of election ultimately universalist and he is not facing up to it? Or is there some misunderstanding of Barth on this point?

First, it must be pointed out that Barth takes the notion of reprobation seriously. However, eternal reprobation is a manifestation of God's love not his wrath and justice as the older Reformed theologians insisted. This love nullifies and frustrates actions and intentions of the reprobate to live a life of unfaith. Even in living a life of sin and autonomy, humanity cannot escape the love of God. This is how God deals with the reprobate. Joseph Bettis writes:

This nullification of the effectiveness of disobedience is the way in which the God of grace and love relates to His disobedient creatures. He does not destroy them by preventing their disobedience, which would indicate His wrath to be separate from his love. But neither does he ignore them by refusing to distinguish between obedience and disobedience, which would indicate His love to lack justice. God deals with disobedience, permitting it to be real disobedience, by frustrating its

intentions to defy God and deify men. It produces only evil and destruction.¹⁷

For Barth, disobedient humanity acts in such a way to escape or deny God's love. But this is an impossibility, for God's love can never be conditioned or determined by any external reality. This is not to say that God is not a God of wrath or justice. God is wrathful and just but these attributes fall under and are defined by His love. God's No is subsumed under His Yes and His Yes is His last word to humanity. But this does not mean that eternal reprobation is not a possibility. Barth writes:

To the man who persistently tries to change truth into untruth, God does not owe eternal patience and therefore deliverance anymore than He does those provisional manifestations. We should be denying or disarming that evil attempt and our own participation in it if, in relation to ourselves or others or all men, we permit ourselves to postulate a withdrawal of that threat and in this

sense to expect or maintain an *apokatastasis* or universal reconciliation as the goal and end of all things. No such postulate can be made even though we appeal to the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Even though the theological consistency might seem to lead our thoughts and utterances most clearly in this direction, we must not arrogate to ourselves that which can be given and received only as a free gift.¹⁸

But we are still presented with difficulty of whether Barth's doctrine of election leads to universalism. It is clear, from this passage cited, that he rejects universalism even if his theology leads in that direction. But does his theology lead to universalism? One way to shed light on this difficulty is to understand more clearly what election means for humanity in Barth's thinking.

To be elect means that all of humanity is defined by the person and work of Christ. We only know what it means to be human from the truly human person who was Christ. Furthermore, Barth is operating with a universal understanding of the atonement, as opposed to universal salvation, in that it is applicable and efficacious for all of humanity. Therefore, this must be the proclamation of the Church. The Church must see all of humanity as defined by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. All of humanity is the object of God's grace and covenant and is defined as such. Barth writes:

It is therefore impossible . . . to regard any of them as if they were not elect, as if God's love for men did not apply to them to, as if His covenant of grace had not been sealed for them, as if the godlessness in which they deny their real status were to be taken seriously as conclusive, as if it were therefore senseless and futile to witness to them too of the divine election of grace that

has taken place in Jesus Christ.¹⁹

For Barth, the doctrine of election has to do more with the definition of being rather than with any assumption regarding the destiny of each individual. With this definition in mind the Church must proclaim the Gospel in terms of reception and not rejection.²⁰

However, the universal scope of the atonement and the proclamation of the Church as such does not entail the salvation of all of humanity. Barth adamantly states that this doctrine does great violence to the New Testament and that nowhere in the New Testament does it clearly say that all will be saved.²¹ For Barth, election is the definition of the being of humanity not the necessary destiny of each individual.

Furthermore, election is the free grace of God. As we have seen God loves in freedom from all of eternity. But the election of humanity is not an absolute divine decree of the destiny of each individual. It is not as abstract decreed which has determined before hand the destiny of all of humanity. God's election of humanity is an eventful and continual activity of God. It is dynamic not static, it is concrete not abstract. Barth writes:

It is always the concern of God to decide what is the world and the human totality for which the man Jesus Christ is elected, and which is itself elected in and with Him. It is enough for us to know and remember that at all events it is the omnipotent loving-kindness of God which continually decides this. For the fact that Jesus Christ is the reality and revelation of the omnipotent loving-kindness of God towards the whole world and every man is an enduring event which is continually fulfilled in new encounters and transactions, in which God the Father lives and works through the Son, in which the Son of God Himself, and the Holy Spirit of the Father and the Son, lives and works at this or that place or time, in which He rouses and finds faith in this or that man, in which He is recognized and apprehended by this and that man in the promise and in their election - by one here and one there, and therefore by many men.²²

Barth's doctrine of election is rooted in the freedom of God and is worked out in the freedom of God also. It is not an absolute divine decree as such. It is a free, dynamic and continual action of God. God is not boxed in by His primal decision to be for humanity but is always free in His being for humanity. For Barth, universalism is not necessary because God is a God who loves in freedom and this freedom does not rule out eternal reprobation.

Because Barth takes the notion of God's freedom seriously he is able to avoid any necessary connection of universalism with his doctrine of election. While there may seem to be a difficulty, Barth overcomes this difficulty with his radical notion of God's freedom.²³ The election of humanity is not a divine static or absolute decree which determined the destiny of humanity before the world began. The election of humanity is dynamic and active and free.

However, though Barth denied being a universalist and his doctrine of election does not necessarily entail universalism, it is still a possibility. Barth states that we must take seriously passages that seem to point in this direction (i.e., Col. 1:19).²⁴ Indeed, Barth believes that God's election of humanity is one that is open and not

closed, it does not exclude but include. Barth writes:

In grateful recognition of the grace of the divine freedom we cannot venture the . . . statement that there cannot and will not be this final opening up and enlargement of the circle of election.²⁵

For Barth, we cannot venture one way or another on the possibility or impossibility of the universal salvation of humanity. This rests in the freedom of God to be truly God in His freedom for humanity. Barth wants to take seriously the reprobate and his or her destiny but he is lead because of the Gospel to take God's grace more seriously. Barth will not come down one way or the other but he certainly hopes and prays for the universal salvation of humanity.

NOTES

¹ Barth, Karl, *Church Dogmatics*. vol. II / 2, p.20.

² Ibid. p.25.

³ Ibid. p.13.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid. p.54.

⁶ Ibid. p.64.

⁷ Ibid. p.105.

⁸ Ibid. p.116.

⁹ Ibid. p.116-117.

¹⁰ Ibid. p.118-122.

¹¹ Ibid. p.122-125.

¹² Ibid. p.125-127.

¹³ Ibid. p.146-147.

¹⁴ Ibid. p.167.

¹⁵ Ibid. p.322.

¹⁶ Ibid. p.417.

¹⁷ Bettis, Joseph D., *Is Karl Barth a Universalist?* Scottish Journal of Theology, p. 423-436. 1967 (20).

¹⁸ C.D. IV/3, p.477.

¹⁹ C.D. II/2, p.416.

²⁰ Colwell, John, *The Contemporaneity of the Divine Decision: Reflections on Barth's Denial of 'Universalism' in Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell: Papers Presented at the Fourth Edinburgh Conference in Christian Dogmatics*. ed. by Nigel Cameron, Baker House Publishing (Grand Rapids) 1992, p.148.

²¹ C.D. II/2, p.423.

²² C.D. II/2, p.422.

²³ Bromiley, Geoffrey W., *Introduction to the Theology of Karl Barth*. T&T Clark (Edinburgh) 1979, p.97.

²⁴ Barth, Karl, *The Humanity of God*. John Knox Press (Virginia) 1960, p.61.

²⁵ C.D. II/2, p.418-419.

A Pascalian Argument Against Universalism

Jay Wesley Richards

Introduction

My aspirations for this essay are modest. After defining some terms, I present one of the better arguments for the doctrine of universalism. Then I consider the primary grounds for our knowledge of this doctrine (namely, Scripture). Given the nature of these grounds, I then attempt a cost/benefit analysis to reveal that the benefits of teaching this doctrine are so meager, and the costs so immense (if we are mistaken), that we can never justify teaching it. Thus I conclude that Christians act imprudently and irresponsibly whenever they do teach universalism. All my arguments presuppose readers who are broadly-speaking members of the Reformed tradition, or who at least commit themselves to the belief that Scripture should be one's primary source for constructing Christian doctrine. This does not require a denial of all other sources of doctrinal authority such as tradition, philosophical argument, moral intuitions, or even "personal experience"; but the argument does require the commitment to Scripture as the *primary* authority for Christian theology. For this reason, the only case for universalism I consider is one which has some exegetical strength, and some foothold in the Christian tradition. My argument will be unconvincing for the individual who deems biblical texts as secondary or irrelevant for doing Christian theology.

I. Some Definitions

For the sake of clarity, we should agree on some definitions of terms. By *salvation*, let's mean at least this (though not necessarily only this):

That state of affairs in which a sinful person is brought into right relationship with the just and loving God, in which eternal dwelling in the presence of God is made an actuality.

Let us also assume that whatever Christ accomplished by his incarnation and death on the cross, this accomplishment was the event which made such salvation possible. So Christ's work (as the Son of God, the Word, the second person of the Trinity, and the man Jesus) wrought or *effected salvation*. The saved (whomever they may be) are saved by virtue of this work.

By the doctrine of *universalism*, let's mean the following:

Christ's atoning work on the cross in securing salvation for sinners is not only *sufficient* to save every sinner, but it is also (or will be) *actual*.

That is, for the universalist, by Christ's death, all people are not only given the opportunity to be saved, they are in fact saved. So, in the final consummation, there will be *no one*

who does not enjoy the full benefits of this saving work. Ultimately, everyone will be saved. No one will be barred from God's eternal presence.

By the doctrine of *particularism*, let's mean this:

Although Christ's work on the cross in securing salvation for sinners is sufficient to save every sinner, such salvation will not finally be actual.

That is, for whatever reason, not every person will eternally enjoy the presence of God at the final consummation. Some will not partake of the beatific vision. And by *damnation* or *hell* let's mean that state of affairs in which a person does not so enjoy the divine presence.

These definitions are obviously bare-boned, and do not come close to accommodating all of the biblical allusions and images concerning Christ's work and our salvation. But I choose these minimalist definitions in order to concede as much as possible to the position I am attempting to defeat. So we will adopt only a *privative* definition of hell, given only in terms of what it is *not* with respect to salvation. I will not depend on any of the "positive" portrayals of hell found either in Scripture or the common conception. If I were to include such positive elements, my argument would only be stronger. But for irenic purposes, I will avoid images of fire, eternal darkness, weeping and gnashing of teeth, and immortal worms. Armed with these definitions, we are now ready to enter upon our topic.

II. A Pretty Good Argument for Universalism

While there are many arguments for universalism, I will only consider one. To avoid combating a straw-man, it seems appropriate to consider the strongest one we can muster. Instead of some generic argument, the one I think has the most bite is one which proceeds from specifically Christian, and at least partly biblical premises. It has even more force for those within the Reformed tradition. Let's schematize it for simplicity.

The first premise we must assume we might call the *principle of double jeopardy* (PDJ). Its states that

If a due penalty has been paid for a sin (or crime), that penalty shall not be exacted again.

To use a mundane example, if I (or someone else) pays the required fine for a speeding ticket, this fine will not have to be paid again. This is not so much a deep metaphysical principle as it is a simple exposition of what it means to *pay a fine*. If I still owed the fine after paying it, either I didn't really pay the fine, or someone at the DMV is pulling a fast one. Part of the meaning of *paying the due penalty* is that after I have paid it, I will no longer be in debt for that offense. Analogously, if we are to express anything true when we say that Christ paid the debt for our sins on the cross, something like the principle of double jeopardy must apply. If my *entire* debt is paid, I can't still be liable for the punishment due as a result of my many sins.

Given the principle of double jeopardy, we can formulate the rest of this defense of universalism as follows. To avoid undue complexity, take a particular individual as a representative for all human individuals. Let's call her Gehenna, or Henny for short. Now,

- (P1) If Henny has her debt paid (or her sins atoned), she will not be punished for her sins.
- (P2) Every person has had his or her sins paid by Christ's work on the cross (see, for example, 1 John 2:2 and 1 Tim. 2: 6).
- (C1) Therefore, Henny has had her sins paid for.
- (C2) Therefore, Henny will not be punished for her sins.
- (P3) But, hell is a punishment for unatoned sins.
- (C3) Therefore, Henny will not go to hell.
- (P4) Henny stands in for every person (from our stated premise).
- (C4) Therefore, no one will go to hell.

This sort of argument is especially compelling for those in the Reformed tradition, who resist separation between the work of atonement and its effects. For others such as Wesleyan-Arminians, Orthodox, and Catholics, Christ's work on the cross may be conceived (usually implicitly) as making the salvation of everyone *possible*, but not necessarily *actual*. To Reformed ears, this can sound like a denial of the full sufficiency of Christ's work. So it is very natural in the Reformed tradition to tie the work of the cross very closely to its effects in justifying the believer, leaving little slack for doctrines such as human self-determination or individual freedom. Of course, most Reformed thinkers acknowledge the importance of repentance for individual appropriation of the work of the cross, but not in such a way that repentance is a causal condition for that work. Rather, repentance is itself *evidence* that an individual is in fact part of the elect for whom the forgiveness of sins is intended.

It was probably the pressure of this view of the atonement that led the Reformed scholastics to develop explicitly the doctrine of *limited atonement*. They would have conceded the reasoning of the argument above, except for one of the premises, namely, the claim that Henny could represent *every person*. For the Reformed scholastic, Henny could exemplify the *elect*, but not the entire race. Why would the scholastics have been so stingy with the salvific effects of the cross? We should not ascribe to them ignoble motivations, such as the desire to make sure unbelievers got what was coming to them. Rather, we should see that they *deduced* it from the particular Reformed understanding of the complete sufficiency of the cross for salvation *plus* the clear biblical evidence that not all will be saved. If some are to be consigned to perdition, they reasoned, then the work of the cross must not extend to every human being. If you remove this premise, which the Reformed scholastics culled from Scripture, but retain their view of the atonement, you get essentially the argument for universalism described above.

I say this neither to deny nor defend this scholastic view, but to draw attention to the fact that this is likely a reason this argument for universalism is popular in Reformed circles, and to note that a turn toward universalism at Princeton Theological Seminary is not *simply* a movement toward liberalism (even if it is partly that). At least *this* form of universalism has some specifically Christian premises.

This argument can be strengthened with additional premises, such as reference to passages of Scripture that, at least in isolation, seem to imply universalism. So, in Colossians, Paul says that through Christ, "God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven by making peace through the blood of his cross" (1:20). There are others, such as 1 Corinthians 15:20-28, Acts 3:21, and 1 Tim. 4:10. Also, there are passages such as 1 Tim. 2:4, which expresses God's desire for *all* to be saved. Conjoin these passages with some philosophical objections against hell and an appeal to moral intuitions about its unfairness, and you've got a pretty good argument for universalism.

III. Types of Systematic Theological Arguments

At this point many will protest that I have given too rosy a picture of the biblical support for this doctrine; but before we consider that, we should concede that there is a case to be made for universalism which is not simply an expression of twentieth century sentimentalism.

Nevertheless, we should recognize this argument for what it is: a *systematic theological argument*. This is not a bad thing; after all, I myself am seeking a degree in this very discipline. But this argument is of the systematic theological species. And it should be granted the same status as all such arguments, and judged accordingly. So what are our criteria for evaluating systematic theological arguments? Surely coherence and proper logic will be included in our list. But in the Reformed tradition and Protestantism generally, the primary criterion is of course *sola Scriptura*. We need not take this criterion in the most restrictive and implausible way, which would require that we deny the force of any other source than the express words of Scripture. But I think as a bare minimum this criterion requires that we give Scripture the primary place among our sources for systematic theological arguments.

Some arguments are given clear and unambiguous warrant from Scripture, such as the claim that God exists and created the world. Such claims, if we trust the testimony of Scripture, we may say are biblically *established* (I'm not saying this establishes God's existence). Other arguments are *underdetermined* by Scripture. That is, a theory might be consistent with and even derived from Scripture, but a different theory might be more or less consistent with it as well. In such a case, neither theory is *required* as the only legitimate interpretation of Scripture. Sincere exegetes may disagree without impugning one another's piety or intellectual integrity. I tend to think the dispute between infant and believer's baptism falls into this category. If this is correct, then an exact theory of baptism is underdetermined by Scripture.

On the other hand, some arguments are just *not compatible* with Scripture. I count some of Rudolf Bultmann's attempted compromises between naturalism and biblical language as fairly obvious examples (of course, I'm not claiming that such arguments are always easy to recognize). Finally there are *hybrid* theological arguments, which are clearly compatible with some portions of Scripture, and might even be derived from such portions, but which are in either apparent or actual conflict with other

parts. In this type, some conclusions of an argument may seem to follow validly from biblically warranted premises, but tend to go far beyond or even violate what Scripture says elsewhere. Such an argument will have textual *anomalies* which it cannot account for. Usually the advocate of such a theory will attempt to explain away such anomalies, or to interpret them in a way which is compatible with the main argument. Evaluation of such arguments can be very difficult, even giving rise to new Protestant denominations in the process (I say this in all seriousness). There may be an alternate argument which accounts well for the anomalies of the other argument, but which has different textual anomalies itself. So passages like 1 John 2:2 and 1 Tim. 2:6

may be an irritating anomaly for the Calvinist who affirms a doctrine of limited atonement, and all those "election" passages in Romans and Ephesians may function similarly for the Arminian. I do not wish to defend any of these points here; but I think we need these distinctions in order to evaluate the argument for universalism.

Let's count systematic theological arguments as falling roughly into one of these four categories: (1) *established*, (2) *underdetermined*, (3) *incompatible*, or (4) *hybrid*. These obviously exist on a spectrum; but for simplicity, let's define these four as set-theoretical complements, so that any such argument will fall somewhere into one of these four categories, even though each one may vary in its degree of biblical support. Of course, an argument might be incorrectly categorized at some point. A passage might appear to be an anomaly for some theory, making it a hybrid. But perhaps the passage was misinterpreted, and when it is correctly interpreted, we discover that the theory is fully compatible but just underdetermined by Scripture. So we should leave room for this possibility.

Now equipped, we can consider our argument for universalism. Which category should it be placed in? To be *established*, no alternate theory can be compatible with all the textual "data." This is clearly not the case with universalism. Just a single example is sufficient to bar the universalist argument from membership in the club of established theological arguments. Revelation 20: 7-15, and Matt. 25:31-46 (the parable of the sheep and the goats) should suffice. Moreover, these passages, and many similar ones from the gospels and elsewhere, exclude the doctrine from the set of merely underdetermined theories. How about the category of incompatible arguments? The uncharitable might defend this, but the passages mentioned above suggest that there is at least some biblical warrant for the argument for universalism. How much support is another matter. So, at least for the sake of argument and irenicism, let's place universalism among those systematic theological arguments and theories which are deemed *hybrid* with respect to biblical support. It seems to have some support, but it also seems to contradict significant portions of Scripture as well. Less contentiously, we could say it has many textual anomalies it cannot easily account for.

Although an extensive survey and exegesis of relevant

passages is needed to confirm this claim, for the sake of brevity, I will assume that most readers are sufficiently familiar with Scripture to know that the New Testament is replete with references to judgment, condemnation and the like. I personally located fifty such references in the gospels alone, although we haven't the time to consider these here. As a generalization, an *urgency* for repentance marked Jesus' ministry as recorded in the gospels; his parables often served

to warn others to be prepared for the coming of God's Kingdom and its judgment. There seems to be a lot of fuss and anxiety, as if people's very lives and destinies were dependent upon their response to his message, as if our actions have eternal significance: "I

tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned" (Matt. 12: 36-7). Many parables speak of everlasting fire, and of the outer darkness. These all serve as likely anomalies for the doctrine of universalism.

In case someone points out that Scripture presents most of the talk about hell and damnation (and so for particularism) in picturesque, metaphorical and geographical language, we should note that this is beside the point. We could easily concede that Jesus and the authors of the New Testament used such language. We need not expect a biblical treatment of hell to conform to the images of perdition depicted in Gary Larson's *Far Side*. But what relevance does this have? How can one infer from the fact that language about the condemned state is picturesque to the conclusion that it does not really exist? Isn't this usually the intended implication for such arguments? But if colorful or metaphorically descriptive language were evidence that a place or state did not exist, this would be an equally valid argument against the reality of heaven and the Kingdom of God as well. After all, much of the description of these places we receive from Scripture is also couched in geographic and parabolic language. So should we conclude that there is no such state, and that salvation is not really relevant to it? If this is so, then the universalist's argument is undercut as well, since he presumably wants to maintain, not that there is *no* state to which the saved are ushered at death and/or the consummation of all things, but rather that *everyone* is ushered into that blissful state. So let's not be sidetracked by such facile arguments.

I think the abundance of references to damnation, and the way in which it is presupposed in the urgency throughout the New Testament is prevalent enough to make our argument for universalism err on the side of being incompatible with Scripture. But the few passages we've mentioned lead me to designate it as a *hybrid* theory. Now, for the sake of argument let's assume that the doctrine of particularism, as defined above, is also a hybrid argument. In fact, I think it is very close to a confirmed but underdetermined doctrine. But let's concede as much as plausible to universalism. Let's even say they are *equally possible alternatives* given our primary basis for knowledge

I desire to go to Hell, not to Heaven. In Hell I shall enjoy the company of popes, kings and princes, but in Heaven are only beggars, monks, hermits and apostles.

—Machiavelli, *On his deathbed*

of such things (namely, Scripture). Let's assume, like Buridan's ass caught between two stables, that these alternatives look to us like equally balanced exegetical options. Which one ought we to believe, and which one ought we to teach?

If this *were* the case, someone might counsel that we all be good pluralists, and advocate the doctrine, "to each his own." But this seems to me to be manifest foolishness. It is at this point that a cost/benefit analysis becomes appropriate. For if we really are trapped between these two major alternatives, the relative costs and benefits for teaching each one become profoundly important, and may compel us to move in one way rather than the other.

If we're committed to scriptural authority, then whatever Scripture in fact teaches, and whatever the Spirit intends us to learn from it, is what we should teach. At the least, if there is a discoverable truth to the matter concerning the extent of salvation, then we will discover this truth from Scripture. So the Reformed commitment, at least formally, is to believe and advocate the *truth*, and to treat *Scripture* as our primary source for teaching certain truths (particularly theological ones). But sometimes we have only a hint concerning the truth about things. Let us assume that the facts of the matter concerning the ultimate destiny of some people is an area about which we are uncertain. We are unable to decide whether universalism or particularism is *true*. And so, as Christians, we are unable to decide which doctrine to *teach*. I will now argue that even if we *were* in such a state of equipoise between these two alternatives, we would still be nowhere nearly justified in teaching universalism as the truth. In fact, we would be grossly irresponsible if we did so. We can see this most easily seen by running a cost/benefit analysis.

IV. Universalism and Particularism: A Cost/Benefit Analysis

For simplicity, let's assume *universalism* and *particularism* are our primary alternatives, but that we are unable to decide because of the ambiguity of our epistemic base (i.e., the basis of our knowledge of this question). Even if our evidence for them were equal, the costs and benefits of the respective doctrines are anything but equal.

We should distinguish this from two similar but less respectable types of arguments. The first is the argument *ad misericordiam*. This argument is actually fallacious, and would go as follows: *The results of teaching universalism are bad; therefore, it's not true*. Put so baldly, no bright person would fall for it. Nevertheless, this form is apt to hide among a bluster of big words, so it's important that we

not construe our argument this way. A more deceptively similar, but still different argument would be the pragmatic one. It might go like this: *The results of teaching universalism are bad; therefore, we ought not teach it*. This might be a legitimate argument for some things. However, it is unworthy of theological pursuits, because I think we should be primarily concerned with knowing and teaching

what we take to be *true*. Concerns about the results of such teaching should always be secondary. And truth and results are not synonymous. Of course, we hope that teaching the truth will produce desirable consequences; but if we seek results at the expense of truth, we make ourselves objects of the wrath of the One who is the Author of truth.

My argument here assumes that we want to teach what we think is true. However, the basis for our knowledge of a certain truth--namely, the extent of salvation--looks a little ambiguous (or so I'm allowing for the sake of argument). Given such a

dilemma, pragmatic questions of cost and benefit become permissible, and, in this case, I think decisive. With these provisos, let's list some of the costs and benefits of our alternative doctrines.

First, universalism. What are some generic benefits to teaching it? If we were correct, the greatest benefit is that we would be teaching the truth. What other benefits might accrue (irrespective of its truth or falsity)? Well, it would surely comfort our consciences as Christians. We would not need to worry about the fact that we have never witnessed to our agnostic and unrepentant colleagues at work. We need not fret too much that people are dying in Tibet without ever having heard the name of Jesus Christ. No doubt the level of anxiety among Christians would significantly diminish. We might reduce high blood pressure, ulcers, and many other stress-related illnesses among the Christian constituency privy to this nice teaching. On a less trivial note, we would have a far more felicitous answer to skeptics who deny God's goodness because of the problem of evil, of which damnation is perhaps the worst example. In fact, there might even be some individuals, such as Bertrand Russell, who would be willing to consider becoming Christians if we dropped the doctrine of damnation from the Christian canon. In *Why I Am Not A Christian*, Russell cited Jesus' teachings about hell as one of his reasons for doubting that Christ spoke divine truth (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1957, p. 17). And perhaps Europe could have avoided such unfortunate events as the *Thirty Years' War* and the Crusades if this doctrine had caught on sooner.

Concerning costs: If we are honest, we should admit that there would probably be fewer Christians than there are

A still more formidable objection is drawn from the goodness of God. It is said to be inconsistent with his benevolence that He should allow any of his creatures to be forever miserable. . . . It should constrain us to humility, and to silence on this subject, that the most solemn and explicit declaration of the everlasting misery of the wicked recorded in the Scriptures, fell from the lips of Him, who, though equal with God, was found in fashion as a man, and humbled Himself unto death, even the death of the cross, for us men and for our salvation.

—Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*

now. This doesn't mean that all missionary activity and evangelism would cease. But it would surely be less common, since its urgency would be greatly diminished. After all, what missionary would be willing to die in her own pool of blood at the hands of pagan tribes if the salvation of such tribes were in no way dependent on such risk? In fact, if I were to be realistic, probably neither I nor my family would have been Christians, since I suspect no missionaries would have risked life and limb to bring the gospel to my undoubtedly blood-thirsty northern European ancestors. Of course, this fact would not redound to any of our damnations (if our teaching were correct); we would just probably not have experienced the joy that often accompanies the Christian life. While hardship often follows it, and for some even martyrdom, I have no doubt that the overall benefit of the Christian life makes for healthier and happier social and economic experiences, at least at a societal level. So some of the spread of Christianity would likely have been stunted.

Now, what about the costs of teaching *particularism* (irrespective of its truth or falsity)? Well, we could probably expect the opposite of the benefits listed above. Christians would be likely to suffer no small dose of torment over their lukewarm witness to their fellow human beings. The (presumably) lost in Tibet might haunt the dreams of the more thoughtful Christians. Theological arguments and fights might be more prominent, and missionary zeal might foster obsessive-compulsive disorders of many varieties. We would be strapped with some troubling questions concerning the problem of evil, and no easy answers for the skeptic. And Bertrand Russell would have stayed the same intransigent atheist he was. On the other hand, the benefits would at least equal whatever worldly benefits do in fact accrue from the spread of Christian thought and belief.

But now, as you are no doubt anticipating, we need to consider the costs that would result if we teach universalism, **AND WE ARE WRONG**. For, if you will remember, we admitted that our knowledge of this comforting doctrine is tenuous and uncertain. Need I ask what the costs would be if we propagated this notion, and we were mistaken? What if the things we say and do in this life do have *eternal consequences*, not only for our own lives, but for the lives of our fellow human beings? What if Jesus had a very strong motivation for commanding us to *go and make disciples of all nations*? What if God has so constructed the world that our obedience to his command is part of his eternal plan, and is in some inscrutable way a (divinely-ordained) contingency? What if our arrogance in denying the obvious tenor of the gospels results in a lessening of evangelistic zeal, and a decrease of repentance and saving knowledge of God? Universalists uniformly deny this connection, but common sense and study of denominational missionary activities clearly confirm a *very high correlation* between the teaching of universalism and a diluting or redefining of the Great Commission. Universalism does not logically entail a repudiation of a call to repentance and acceptance of Christ's lordship, but these sure do seem to follow as a historical fact. And besides all this, the cost of teaching universalism if it is not true is that *we will be teaching a falsehood*.

V. Conclusion

Compared to these costs, the benefits of teaching universalism and the costs of teaching particularism seem too meager to countenance. For both are concerned with the temporary things of this life. If we teach universalism and we're right, the *infinite* good which will follow is the same as if we do not teach it. For the ultimate salvation of all is not at stake, and will result either way. If we teach particularism and we're wrong, the infinite good of universalism will still result--so there's no infinite *cost*. After all, no one's salvation is at stake just because Christians teach erroneous doctrines. But if we teach universalism and we're *wrong*, the cost of so doing is as infinite as the good of enjoying the eternal presence of the living God, and surely this is a cost greater than any other. So the costs of teaching universalism erroneously are infinite, whereas the costs of teaching particularism erroneously are a mere finite pittance. Therefore, short of certainty concerning the truth of universalism, the prudent will not teach universalism, and will teach particularism. Of course, this is not yet a positive case for the truth of particularism, which goes beyond the scope of this essay. My intention here is only to nip the teaching of universalism in the bud. And for these reasons, I conclude that it is foolish for the Christian to teach this doctrine.

VI. Postscript

We should note that there are different forms which universalism might take, and we might wonder whether this critique applies to all of them. Obviously we will have to take it case by case. Let's consider just one. What ought we to say about systematic theological theories containing premises that seem to lead to universalist conclusions, even though the theorists repudiate such conclusions? For instance, some judge that Barth's view, in which everyone is both elect and reprobate in Christ, implies universalism. But Barth himself repudiated this doctrine, and insisted that Holy Scripture did not teach such a view. But what if someone argued the equivalent of premises (1) through (4) in our ideal argument above, but just denied that conclusion (4) followed from it? Perhaps they conscript a category such as divine freedom, in order to block the inference. How should we judge such a move? I would suggest that we study such proposals very carefully, to decide if they really resolve the dilemma, or just avoid it by a sleight-of-hand. If the implications of a theory are clearly universalist, I think it would be susceptible to the critique suggested here. But whether or not any particular theory has such implications is a decision that all young theologians will prayerfully have to decide for themselves.

I hold the gnashing of teeth of the damned to be an external pain following upon evil conscience, that is, despair, when men see themselves abandoned by God.

—Luther, *Table Talk*

Teaching Intelligent Design as Religion or Science?

William A. Dembski

Imagine yourself the head of Christian education for a large local church. Suppose that among its many ministries the church operates a high school. Let us say the high school has been in existence for a number of years, and has until now encountered no difficulties with state certification boards. Unfortunately, this happy state of affairs is about to change. Recently the state certification boards have had an influx of new policy makers who are largely unsympathetic to Christian education. These policy makers want to see any distinctives between Christian and public school education curbed as much as possible.

Thus in reviewing your church's high school curriculum, the new policy makers have been particularly distressed by the way evolution and creation are handled in the biology classes offered by your high school. The policy makers would have no problem if you relegated creation to religion classes, and limited yourself to evolution in the biology classes. They would not even have a problem if in addition to treating evolution in the biology classes you also treated it in religion classes. As far as the new policy makers are concerned, you could criticize evolution to your heart's content within a religion class.

The problem, however, is that you are mixing creation and evolution in your biology classes. Granted, the mention of creation within the biology curriculum would be excusable if creation were presented as an outdated religious dogma with no scientific basis. Thus for purely historical reasons it would be acceptable to describe what people used to think about biological origins—how people used to invoke supernatural interventions and a host of other now disreputable notions. In this way you would not be challenging evolutionary theory by suggesting that a case of genuine intellectual merit exists against it.

But this is precisely what your high school is doing, namely, subverting the teaching of evolution. To be sure, you are fulfilling your obligation to the state by teaching evolutionary theory as it is presented in accepted high-school and beginning-college biology texts. But having presented what you are required to teach, you are also critiquing the theory you have just presented. What's more—to add insult to injury—you are offering a positive alternative to evolutionary theory, an approach increasingly referred to as intelligent design. You are even using a supplemental biology text called *Of Pandas and People*¹ to teach intelligent design. The teaching of intelligent design particularly infuriates the new policy makers. As far as they are concerned, intelligent design is just a sexy new name for the tired old creationism of the 1980's. This brand of creationism was roundly defeated in the courts, is not permitted to be taught in the science curricula of public high schools, and certainly does not deserve to be resurrected. Intelligent design is not science, and should not be taught as science. So the story goes.

Even if one leaves aside positive alternatives to evolutionary theory (like intelligent design), and focuses exclusively on negative critiques whose only aim is to punch holes in evolutionary theory—even such negative critiques are unacceptable to the new policy makers. From their perspective critiquing evolution is just as much a form of indoctrination as presenting a positive alternative. We do not tolerate history teachers who critique the holocaust by suggesting it never happened. We do not tolerate physics teachers who deny the view that the earth is spherical or doubt whether its motion is around the sun. We do not tolerate chemistry teachers who think the periodic table of the elements is irrelevant to chemistry. So too, we should not tolerate biology teachers who deny the truth of evolutionary theory.²

As far as the new policy makers are concerned, intellectual history has progressed far enough for everyone to realize that creation belongs to the realm of religion and evolution to the realm of science, and that the twain do not meet. Religion and science are distinct windows into reality and look upon completely different aspects of reality. As the National Academy of Science has so aptly put it, "Religion and science are separate and mutually exclusive realms of human thought whose presentation in the same context leads to a misunderstanding of both scientific theory and religious belief."³ Although science and religion complement each other, they do not intersect so as to allow insights from one realm to be meaningfully imported into the other.

To recap, you are head of Christian education at a large local church. The high school operated by your church is teaching biology classes that present an alternative to evolutionary theory known as intelligent design. The new policy makers in charge of certifying your high school find this unacceptable and are threatening to pull your certification unless you toe the line and teach evolution exactly as it is presented in approved biology texts—without critique, without an intelligent design alternative. As head of Christian education for this large local church, what are you going to do? How are you going to advise the relevant judicatory of your church in deciding what to do about the teaching of creation and evolution within its high school biology curriculum?⁴

The path of least resistance is obviously to capitulate to the new policy makers and simply remove anything contrary to evolutionary theory to a safe place in the curriculum where the policy makers will not cause trouble. As far as the policy makers are concerned, any place outside the science curriculum will do. And since yours is a Christian high school, the most obvious place would be to place the critique of evolutionary theory in a philosophy or religion course, something like "Contemporary Issues Facing the Church."

Should you capitulate? Why shouldn't you capitulate? After all, what is the harm in capitulating? You will still be getting the same material across to your students. Isn't it the case that we should choose our battles wisely, and not expend a great deal of effort fighting for things that in the end do not matter very much. To spite the new policy makers you could even require that all students take an entire course (say within the religion department) devoted

exclusively to critiquing evolution and promoting intelligent design. Whereas in the past students had only a handful of lectures critiquing evolutionary theory and promoting intelligent design, now they would be required to take an entire course on the subject. Wouldn't this be a way of turning defeat into victory, all the while sidestepping the nasty new policy maker's demands.

Unfortunately, No. The problem is that this move fails to recognize the immense cultural prestige which our society accords to science, but denies to religion. This disparity ought to be a fundamental concern for Christian educators. To relegate the critique of evolution to religion or philosophy or anything other than science is to perpetuate this disparity and, in effect, deny the very purpose for Christian education in the first place. If there is any point to Christian education, it is to present the various academic disciplines within an

adequate conceptual framework for making sense of the world. What's more, as Abraham Kuyper so forcefully argued in the last century, the only adequate framework for the Christian to make sense of the world is one in which Christ reigns supreme in every "department of life."⁵ The framework that currently guides public education, by making science inviolable and religion subordinate to science, thus provides an inadequate conceptual framework for making sense of the world, and must needs be unacceptable to any Christian educator with a coherent philosophy of Christian education.

The over-inflated role of science within our society must not be left unchallenged, and certainly not by Christian educators. Within our society, science is advertised as the only universally valid form of knowledge. This is not to say that scientific knowledge is deemed true or infallible. But within our society, whatever is purportedly the best scientific account of a given phenomenon demands our immediate and unconditional assent. This is regarded as a matter of intellectual honesty. Thus to consciously resist what is currently the best scientific theory in a given area is, in the words of Richard Dawkins, to be either stupid, wicked, or insane.⁶ Thankfully, Richard Dawkins is more explicit than most of his colleagues in making this point, and therefore does Christian educators the service of not papering over the contempt with which the scientific community regards anyone who questions scientific orthodoxy.

It bears repeating: the only universally valid form of knowledge within our society is science. Within late 20th century western society neither religion, nor philosophy, nor literature, nor music, nor art makes any such cognitive claims. Religion in particular is seen as making no universal claims that are obligatory across the board. The

contrast with science is here glaring. Science has given us technology—computers that work as much here as they do in the third world. Science has cured our diseases. Whether we are black, red, yellow, or white, the same antibiotics cure the same infections.

It now becomes clear why relegating a critique of evolutionary theory, and intelligent design in particular, to any realm other than science (e.g., religion) represents so significant a concession. In making this concession a Christian educator engages not in a comfortable truce but in a quiet surrender. If evolutionary theory fails some religious criterion, business will continue as usual. As long as evolutionary theory is the best science of its day, it will continue to demand the society's immediate and unconditional assent. But if evolutionary theory fails as a matter of science, then its day of reckoning will have arrived.

It is precisely at this point, however, that things

become sticky. To be sure, some critiques of evolutionary theory are nothing more than religious. Thus to reject evolutionary theory simply because it conflicts with a literal interpretation of Genesis 1 cannot constitute a scientific critique of evolutionary theory, and ought not to be taught within a science curriculum. On the other hand, if one has genuine scientific reasons for rejecting evolutionary theory, then it is inappropriate to require that these reasons be presented outside a science curriculum. Where things become sticky is whether there can even be such a thing as counter-evidence to evolutionary theory that is properly speaking scientific.

The only legitimate reason for excluding a critique of evolutionary theory from a science curriculum is that the critique is non-scientific. But what makes a critique of evolutionary theory scientific as opposed to non-scientific? Let us first be clear what we mean by the term "evolutionary theory." By this term I mean any account of the origin and development of life which appeals only to non-purposive, undirected natural processes. The most popular such account is what is known as the neo-Darwinian synthesis, of which Richard Dawkins is the most outspoken contemporary proponent.⁷ Competitors to the neo-Darwinian synthesis include Stephen Jay Gould's theory of punctuated equilibria and Stuart Kauffman's self-organizational theory.⁸ But observe that all these accounts are instances of evolutionary theory—however much these accounts may differ on the surface, they are each committed exclusively to naturalistic causes as the only legitimate mode of explanation within science.

By now it has become clear why critiques of evolutionary theory that invoke intelligent design are proscribed from science curricula. Evolutionary theory views natural causes as fully capable of explaining the

If upon entering some home you saw that everything there was well-tended, neat, and decorative, you would believe that some master was in charge of it, and that he himself was much superior to those good things. So too in the home of this world, when you see providence, order and law in the heavens and on earth, believe there is a Lord and Author of the universe, more beautiful than the stars themselves and the various parts of the whole world.

—Latin Apologist Minucius Felix, ca. 235 A.D.

origin and development of life. Intelligent design says No, natural causes are incapable of fully explaining life; what is needed additionally are intelligent causes. But science no longer recognizes intelligent causes as possessing an integral status independent of natural causes. If anything, intelligent causes are nowadays viewed as a byproduct of natural causes in the sense that natural causes gave rise to us, who happen to be intelligent beings and act as intelligent causes. In the end, however, intelligent causes like ourselves are reducible to natural causes, so that intelligent causes become eliminable from science. Intelligent design is therefore not properly speaking scientific, since a more exact analysis will eliminate intelligent causes in favor of natural causes.

This rejection of intelligent causes from science is problematic for it ignores a fundamental question: Are there things intelligent causes governed by minds can do which natural causes governed purely by natural laws cannot do? Before we start eliminating intelligent causes in favor of natural causes, let us recognize that there are good reasons for thinking intelligent causes can do things which natural causes cannot. Although the reduction of intelligent causes to natural causes has a long history, going back at least to the Greek atomists like Democritus, the view that intelligent causes can do things which natural causes cannot also has a long and illustrious history. For instance, in the *Phaedo* (98d-99a) Plato has his hero Socrates distinguish clearly between the intelligent causes that are inducing him to stay in an Athenian jail and await execution, and the natural causes which govern the joints and sinews of his body wherewith he could either stay in prison or escape to save his life. According to Plato, natural causes and intelligent causes are fully compatible and operate in tandem, but are not ultimately reducible the one to the other.⁹

With the rise of modern science, however, intelligent causes fell into disrepute. Aristotelian science, by requiring that everything have a final cause, had proven itself scientifically sterile. This distrust of intelligent causes within science has if anything intensified in our own day, so that we find evangelical scholars who work in the science-theology debate accepting that science has to be "methodologically atheistic."¹⁰ To be sure, these scholars believe in God, and therefore are not "metaphysically atheistic." But they accept that science has to be framed strictly in terms of natural causes governed by natural laws—intelligent causes are therefore strictly *verboten*. Does life exhibit nothing more than the outcome of fully naturalistic purposeless material processes, or does life exhibit the purposeful activity of an intelligent agent? Methodological atheism denies that life can exhibit

intelligent causation in a scientifically meaningful way. As a matter of faith, we can attribute the origin and development of life to an intelligent cause. But as a matter of science, we are left with no more than natural causes, from which it is impossible to form any definite conclusions about an intelligent cause, much less a Christian God.

It is crucial here that we distinguish between intelligent causes as a faith commitment and intelligent causes as a scientific inference. As Christians we all know that God created the world by wisdom (cf. Psalm 136:5). For the Christian there is no question that an intelligent cause underlies the world.¹¹ The

Hume did not think of the design argument [as an inference to the best explanation]. For him . . . it [was] an argument from analogy, or an inductive argument. This alternate conception of the argument makes a great deal of difference. Hume's criticisms are quite powerful if the argument has the character he attributes to it. But if the argument is, as I maintain, an inference to the best explanation, Hume's criticisms entirely lose their bite.

—Elliott Sober, *Philosophy of Biology*

question is rather an epistemological one—how do we know that an intelligent cause underlies the world? It is here that intelligent design wants to challenge the way science is currently practiced, arguing that intelligent causes belong within science, that intelligent causes can do things which natural causes cannot do, and that we can know the difference.¹² It is one thing to hold as a faith commitment that an intelligence underlies the world, but then be unable to read the book of nature in a way that makes this intelligence evident. It is

another thing to look at the world and find features in it that can be reliably correlated with intelligent agency. In the latter instance, attributing the world to an intelligent cause is no longer simply a faith commitment, but actually constitutes a scientific inference.

In describing the controversy over intelligent design in a recent article for the *New York Times*, Peter Steinfels misses this point. According to Steinfels, "The issue is not whether creation took days or eons. The issue is purpose: Is there an intelligible and caring purpose at work in the universe or is the cosmos, human life included, ultimately the manifestation of blind chance?"¹³ Steinfels is correct as far as he goes, but he errs by leaving the question of intelligent causation at the level of religious belief. The important question is whether there are good scientific reasons for thinking that an intelligent cause is at work in universe. Anyone who wants to engage the secular culture with a public theology (and Christian educators are key in this regard) must come to terms with this question. Religious believers have on religious grounds always believed that an intelligent cause underlies the universe. The crucial question is whether there are also scientific grounds for holding this belief.

Intelligent design theorists say Yes, there are valid scientific grounds for holding that an intelligent cause has been active in the origin and development of life. Much of the work in this area is recent, and has been motivated, on the one hand, by the consistent failure of evolutionary

theory to account for the specified complexity of life, and, on the other, by the tendency of so-called "scientific creationists" to conflate a literal reading of Genesis 1 with their scientific work. Recent books on intelligent design theory have been written by Walter ReMine (an engineer), Michael Behe (a biochemist), and myself (a mathematician).¹⁴ In each case we introduce a criterion by which to distinguish what intelligent causes can do from what natural causes cannot do.

For instance, Michael Behe introduces the notion of *irreducible complexity* to distinguish intelligent causes from natural causes. As an example of irreducible complexity Behe considers a mousetrap. According to Behe a mousetrap is irreducibly complex because it loses functionality as soon as any of its components are removed: remove the spring, and the trap won't close; remove the latch, and the trap can't be set; etc. So too, Behe finds cells comprised of "molecular machines" (like the bacterial flagellum) which display irreducible complexity. Behe presents an in-principle argument why evolutionary theory cannot account for these systems and why they are better explained by appealing to intelligent causes.

Well, that certainly seems to settle the matter—intelligent design is properly scientific and ought to be taught within high-school science curricula. Not so fast say the critics. Even if intelligent design eventually proves itself to be properly scientific, for now it is much too new to be tested on high school students in their biology courses. High school students should not be treated as guinea pigs for a course of instruction that may in the end just turn out to be religion masquerading as science. Granted that Michael Behe's criterion of irreducible complexity has a certain intuitive appeal, we ought nonetheless to demand that this criterion be properly vetted by the scientific community before admitting it into high-school science curricula.

Although this caution appears well-founded, it in fact betrays a strong metaphysical bias of its own, and one that evinces an unreasoned commitment to naturalism—the view that nature is all there is and that proper explanation is always in terms of natural causes governed by natural laws. As strictly a logical possibility, naturalism may be the way things are. But naturalism is hardly a necessary truth, and the debate over its truth is by no means closed. To demand that Behe's criterion receive the approval the scientific community before it can be taught in science curricula is, in the naturalistic ethos that currently dominates science, to guarantee that Behe's criterion will not be taught in science curricula. What appears as an innocent caution therefore ends up being an act of scientific imperialism, guaranteeing that intelligent design will never make it onto the scientific playing field.

Indeed, who sets the rules of science? The very demand that science explain in terms of natural rather than intelligent causes is itself applied selectively. Whole branches of science already presuppose that features of the natural world can display unequivocal marks of intelligence causation, thereby clearly signaling the activity of an intelligent designer (cf. anthropology, archeology, and forensic science). Nor need the intelligences inferred in this way necessarily all be human or even earthbound. Consider,

for instance, NASA's SETI program (Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence) in which certain radio signals from outer space would with full confidence be interpreted as signaling the presence of an extra-terrestrial intelligence. There are reliable criteria for inferring intelligent causes. Certain special sciences already admit as much. Why then refuse their admission into biology?

There is a double standard at work here. And as G. K. Chesterton has so perceptively noted, behind every double standard is a hidden agenda. The hidden agenda in this case is ensuring the continued dominance of naturalism within the scientific establishment. For instance, the National Association of Biology Teachers (NABT) promotes precisely this hidden agenda when it endorses evolutionary theory to the total exclusion of intelligent design: "The diversity of life on earth is the outcome of evolution: an unsupervised, impersonal, unpredictable and natural process of temporal descent with modification that is affected by natural selection, chance, historical contingencies and changing environments."¹⁵

Whence the NABT's supreme confidence in evolutionary theory given the severe problems that continue to trouble it? The origin of life, the origin of the genetic code, the origin of multicellular life, the origin of sexuality, the gaps in the fossil record, the biological big bang that occurred in the Cambrian era, the development of complex organ systems, and the development of irreducibly complex molecular machines are just a few of the more serious difficulties that confront every account of the origin and development of life that posits only purposeless, material processes. These problems are not going away and, if anything, the prospect of accounting for them given naturalism is becoming worse with time.¹⁶ Whence, then, the NABT's dogmatism in excluding intelligent design from the scientific playing field?

The only reasons for excluding intelligent design from science are self-serving ones. Philosophers of science who remain fully committed to evolutionary theory, but know the difference between a good and a bad argument admit as much. For instance, Elliott Sober, a philosopher of biology at the University of Wisconsin, will write, "Before Darwin's time, some of the best and the brightest in both philosophy and science argued that the adaptedness of organisms can be explained only by the hypothesis that organisms are the product of intelligent design. This line of reasoning—the *design argument*—is worth considering as an object of real intellectual beauty. It was not the fantasy of crackpots but the fruits of creative genius."¹⁷ Nor does Sober exclude intelligent design from staging a comeback: "Perhaps one day, [intelligent design] will be formulated in such a way that the auxiliary assumptions it adopts are independently supported. My claim is that no [intelligent design theorist] has succeeded in doing this yet."¹⁸ My claim, on the other hand, is that design theorist are just beginning to succeed in this respect.

In conclusion, as head of Christian education for a large local church, the right thing for you to do is to stand your ground and continue to have intelligent design taught in the biology classes of your high school. The reason for taking this stand has nothing to do with a narrow, self-serving fundamentalism according to which Christianity will prosper

only if evolutionary theory can be discredited. Intelligent design is not the latest Christian ploy to undermine evolutionary theory and thereby promote Christianity. The question, rather, is one of truth and fairness: to determine the scientific merits of evolutionary theory and intelligent design.

This is not to stack the deck and assert that intelligent design is true. Evolutionary theory may indeed be true. But if so, its truth ought to be ascertained not by artificially constricting the playing field on which scientific theories are decided. As things stand now, the new policy makers in charge of school certification are ruling intelligent design out of court without a fair hearing. This attitude cannot help further the cause of truth. Nor does it make for good pedagogy. The reason, then, for continuing to teach intelligent design within the biology curriculum of your Christian high school is to promote the free expression and critical examination of ideas. And within Christian education this is without a doubt the best signifier of the gospel.

Notes

¹Percival Davis and Dean H. Kenyon, *Of Pandas and People: The Central Question of Biological Origins*, 2nd edition (Dallas: Haughton, 1993). This text remains a matter of ongoing controversy. Conservative school boards regularly try to introduce it whereas the ACLU tries to keep it out of bounds. Articles keep appearing in major newspapers describing the trouble caused by this book. See for instance Jessica Mathews' article in *The Washington Post* (April 8, 1996, Monday), p. A21, entitled "Creationism Makes a Comeback."

²Eugenie Scott, who heads a pro-evolution watch-dog group in California, makes precisely this argument. See her article "Keep Science Free from Creationism" (in *Insight*, 21 February 1994), p. 29.

³Quoted from Peter Steinfels article in the New York Times (2 December 1995), p. 12 entitled "A Symposium 70 Years after the Scopes Trial Shows the Debate has Evolved Little."

⁴It is worth stressing that the situation just described is well within the realm of possibility. The threat to Christian schools that they will have their certification pulled if they critique evolutionary theory within a science curriculum is very real—see Ronald Numbers, *The Creationists: The Evolution of Scientific Creationism* (New York: Knopf, 1992), pp. 288-9.

⁵See Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, reprint (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1994), pp., iv and 23. Note that as a mode of ethical discourse, Kuyper's analysis of how the departments of life are to relate amongst themselves and to Christ is primarily teleological, and not so much ethological or deontological.

⁶For an overview of Dawkins' crusade against religion and pro science, see Phillip Johnson, *Reason in the Balance:*

The Case Against Naturalism in Science, Law, and Education (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1995), especially pp. 75-88.

⁷Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker* (New York: Norton, 1987).

⁸For these alternatives to the neo-Darwinian synthesis, see Daniel Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), ch. 10 and pp. 220-227 respectively. These are not the only alternatives Dennett considers.

⁹Note that intelligent causes are not supernatural causes. Intelligent causes can operate in tandem with natural causes, yet without any violation of natural causes—cf. Austin Farrer's notion of "double agency" as described in Diogenes Allen's *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox, 1989), ch. 9. The common concern of theologians that design commits a god-of-the-gaps fallacy is therefore avoided. Elizabeth Achtemeier, for instance, expresses this concern in her book *Nature, God, and Pulpit* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1992), p. 2, and solely on account of it seems to come down in favor of evolutionary theory (see pp. 91-92).

¹⁰See Nancey Murphy's article "Phillip Johnson on Trial: A Critique of His Critique of Darwin," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith*, 45:26-36, 1993.

¹¹Cf. Diogenes Allen, *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World*, especially ch. 9.

¹²See my "The Very Possibility of Intelligent Design" in J. P. Moreland (ed.), *The Creation Hypothesis* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1994), pp. 113-138.

¹³Steinfels, *op. cit.* It appears that Steinfels has been reading Phillip Johnson. Cf. Johnson's two books *Reason in the Balance* (*op. cit.*) and *Darwin on Trial* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1991).

¹⁴Cf. Walter ReMine, *The Biotic Message: Evolution Versus Message Theory* (St. Paul, Minnesota: St. Paul Science, 1993), Michael Behe, *Darwin's Black Box* (New York: Free Press, forthcoming summer 1996), William Dembski, *The Design Inference: Eliminating Chance through Small Probabilities* (under submission with Cambridge University Press).

¹⁵The NABT, "Statement on Teaching Evolution," March 15, 1995.

¹⁶See Michael Denton, *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis* (Bethesda, Maryland: Adler & Adler, 1985), Phillip Johnson, *Darwin on Trial*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1991), and Jon Buell and Virginia Hearn (eds.), *Darwinism: Philosophy or Science?* (Richardson, Texas: Foundation for Thought and Ethics, 1994).

¹⁷Elliott Sober, *Philosophy of Biology* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 1993), p. 29.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 52.

Book Reviews

Homosexuality and the Christian Community

- edited by Choon-Leong Seow, Westminster John Knox Press, 1996.

reviewed by Brian A. Frederick

Anyone interested in the present debate over homosexuality in the church will do well to ponder the new book edited by Professor Choon-Leong Seow entitled *Homosexuality and the Christian Community*. Its thirteen essays written by faculty at Princeton Theological Seminary are concise, provocative, and informative. Can we still view homosexuality as a sin today? Should the church bless homosexual unions as it blesses marriages? Should practicing homosexuals be ordained to the ministry of Word and Sacrament? These are the questions the church must answer, and this book provides a wealth of reasons for answering it one way or the other. It also provides a handy compendium of current reflection on the issue.

For the connoisseur of diverse and peculiar theological argument, this book is a veritable feast. Nine articles provide various reasons for changing the church's traditional stance on the issue. Four articles give reasons for retaining it. I will focus mainly on the nine. All thirteen essays grapple with Scripture and other possible sources of authority. All employ innovative and sophisticated approaches toward understanding and applying the Scriptures.

Unfortunately, the result is sheer confusion and chaos. Any sincere believer who starts this book with little knowledge of the issue but an open mind genuinely seeking God's will will most likely finish it confused. How are we to mediate between such multiplicity of viewpoints and hermeneutical techniques? Are there any answers to these questions? What are they? How are they to be found? Who will declare them, and when? Are we condemned, as Professor Duff suggests, to "continue to struggle to discern God's will in the world" on this issue (and others) without ever reaching a final decision?

Upon reading this book one might think that God intentionally makes knowing His will as difficult as possible. Is the moral status of homosexual behavior really a matter of scriptural ambiguity? Could it be that the reason we suddenly find God's will so difficult to discern in this matter is the hardness and rebelliousness of our hearts?

The clarity of Scripture on the issue and the clear teaching of the Church for nearly 2000 years places the burden of proof squarely on the backs of those who promote a new standard and a new agenda. Professor Duff rightly laments that *this* is the issue that is occupying our attention when there is so much to be done in the world. The battle is raging for the minds and souls of billions, and we are fighting amongst ourselves amidst the baggage. But this issue has not just "presented itself to us" as Professor Duff suggests. An organized lobby has been disturbing the unity of the church for more than two decades bringing this issue

up again and again. The price of such agitation is a church distracted from its mission. We can only hope that those who intend to continue the war regardless of what the General Assembly decides this summer have a compelling reason for perpetuating divisions in Christ's body. It is a serious matter. For some this book will supply the proof needed for a new standard and the compelling reason to continue to perpetuate the strife. No contributor to this book denies the clear sense of what the Scriptures say concerning sexual relations between people of the same sex: it is prohibited as a sin and abomination before God. Yet nine of the thirteen writers seek a way to understand the texts differently.

Professor Blount supplies a helpful distinction between "reading" a text and "understanding" it. Reading a text enables us to know what the text says. It is the "elementary level of reading the prooftexts on the surface." But understanding the text "necessitates an appropriation of the text for Christian living in the contemporary circumstance." Professor Blount's approach works a miracle of the type Bultmann would have scrambled to demythologize: suddenly, we understand the text to say just the opposite of what we read it to say! When we read the text, Paul clearly condemns homosexual relations, but when we understand the text, we are led to reevaluate Paul's position. Implicit in the approach is that it is just Paul and the other human authors speaking in the texts, not the Holy Spirit revealing the will of the eternal, unchanging God.

Professor Blount has put a clever and promising tool in our hands. One can imagine the great theological and moral breakthroughs we could achieve if we applied it to texts that we have hitherto read without understanding. In our new context—oh so different from that of Moses' and Paul's days—we should be pleasantly surprised how we can understand afresh such troubling commands as "Thou shalt not commit adultery," "Thou shalt not steal," and "If you do not forgive others, God will not forgive you." We might then find ourselves with "radical newness and inclusion" in a Church of unrepentant adulterers, thieves, and those who are bitterly implacable in unforgiveness toward anyone who has offended them. Perhaps we could change Jesus' words to His disciples regarding how difficult it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven to read, "With God it is impossible; but through theological sophistry, all things are possible."

Professors Seow and Adam roast an old chestnut to undermine the clear prohibitions of Leviticus. The argument, in brief, is that they are part of the so-called Holiness Code, and because we today do not apply the code's restrictions against crossbreeding animals and wearing garments of mixed fibers, we should not apply its prohibition of homosexual intercourse either. Those who use this argument inevitably resort to the proof-texting for which they condemn others. They choose the prohibitions that are most preposterous to the modern mind to discredit the whole code, without considering what else the code contains and whether the preponderance of the material is applicable. Let us apply this principle. Immediately preceding the prohibition against lying with a male in Leviticus 18:22, we find that we should not offer child sacrifices (not forbidden in the New Testament). The following verse prohibits intercourse with animals (also not

forbidden in the New Testament). The balance of the chapter is given to prohibitions of adultery and incest with various relatives. Chapter 19 forbids us from stealing, from oppressing our neighbor, from taking vengeance, from idol worship, and from having unjust weights and measures. It commands us to love our neighbor as ourself, to honor our parents, and to provide food for the poor. Chapter 20, which contains the second prohibition against male-male intercourse, also prohibits adultery, incest, bestiality, and the cursing of one's parents. Interspersed are a few commands that we find silly (but does that make them so?). The text makes clear that we are to follow these laws in order to be holy unto the Lord our God, into whose presence nothing sinful can come, as the writer of Hebrews warns us: without holiness no one will see the Lord. (12:14)

There is another problem with the popular argument against the so-called holiness code. The Church confesses the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the inspired Word of God. The Old Testament, according to Paul, is useful for our edification and instruction in righteousness. Instead of applying their exegetical skills to the verse prohibiting garments of mixed fabric in order to see whether it may contain a principle applicable today, Professors Seow, Adam, and others read it literalistically and, finding it altogether too ludicrous for their all too modern sensibilities, they mock it, thereby revealing the thoroughness of their own cultural conditioning against any Divine authority. One can only wonder what edifying insights we might gain from this abused verse were Professor Blount's colleagues to try to understand the verse rather than being content with an elementary reading of it.

In large measure, the debate turns upon one's doctrine of the Holy Scriptures. Has God clearly spoken through the prophets and apostles by His Holy Spirit, or are the words of Scripture rendered obscure and fallible by their human element? Here the chickens set loose by modern Protestantism's rejection of what the Bible teaches about its own inspiration have come home to roost. Those who affirm a doctrine of Scripture that at all closely approximates the doctrine taught by the Scriptures themselves and the Church from the beginning generally reject the novelty that homosexual practice is no longer a sin. That doctrine is the doctrine of inerrancy, duly nuanced, as nearly all critics of the doctrine admit. Those who reject the inerrancy of Scripture often also reject the sinfulness of homosexuality. The real battle rages over the nature of Church's source of doctrine and authority. The battle over homosexuality, as painful as it is, is only a manifestation of this more fundamental struggle. B. B. Warfield's question remains pertinent: If we cannot trust what the Scriptures teach concerning their own inspiration, how can we trust what they teach concerning any other matter, even our most cherished doctrines?

This is not the place to prove the orthodox view of Scripture's inspiration. Suffice it to say that Princeton Theological Seminary refuses to grapple with it. Oh, it is mentioned in systematic theology class, but it is usually caricatured, mocked, and dismissed as utter foolishness. B. B. Warfield's explication and defense of this venerable doctrine is ignored, and no wonder: it is so forceful and so well-nuanced to meet modern objections that it is better left

alone. Academic and theological integrity requires that a position's strongest statement be heard and refuted if possible.

The PCUSA and other mainline churches have so diluted their doctrine of Scripture (and rejected church teaching) over the years that they find it hard to take a stand on anything that is not socially popular. Thus we shall not trust what the Holiness Code or Paul have to say homosexuality, for it is not the Holy Spirit speaking but ancient culture. We shall say that a reading of their words may seem to prohibit the practice, but a proper understanding leads to the opposite conclusion. We can do the same with other verses. Does John 3:16 still mean that God loved the whole world? Should the great feminist proof-text Gal 3:28 really be understood as it reads? Can I be sure that when I read "if we confess our sins God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" is the proper understanding of this text for the twentieth century? Should we trust the prophets of pop culture and their arcane, personal 'understandings', or the united testimony of Scripture, Tradition, and the practice of the Church from the beginning?

Returning to specific points raised in Seow's book, we commend Professor Duff for her courage in clearly stating her position in favor of homosexual ordination and marriage. Her treatment of four points of the opposing view laid out in 'A Princeton Declaration' is a model of fairness—so much so that I fear she gets the worst of her own argument—but that is to her credit. She is simply wrong, however, in stating that the gospel teaches us to disagree in love. Where does it say that? Peter, to the contrary, instructs us to "be of one mind" (1 Pet 3:8). Paul is even more forceful: "Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you may be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." (1 Cor 1:10) This does not leave much room for "disagreeing in love" or "agreeing to disagree," at least one such fundamental matters. The unity of the Church of Christ is no superficial matter. God calls us to be of one mind and one judgment, not to disagree in love!

Professor Long also falls afoul this principle of having one mind. He would have us believe that we are all on a pilgrimage towards the distant cathedral of God's truth. But as we are now on the way and have yet to arrive, what may be a Biblical mandate for one congregation may not be for another. On this basis some congregations are free to affirm homosexual intercourse while others reject it, effectively destroying the unity of the church.

Professor Kay argues that when opposing positions appear to be equally balanced with regard to their congruence with Scripture (of course, that is the question, isn't it?), the deadlock may be broken by an appeal to the consistency of each position to worship. On this basis, he concludes that because gays and lesbians stand in the church praying, they already belong to the people of God at prayer, and to be faithful to the gospel, we should recognize them as such. A little reflection will expose the danger of this line of argument. Members of the Klan stand in churches in faithful prayer, but Kay would no doubt exclude them and their positions. Nazis prayed in German churches during Hitler's

regime. Many 'faithful' Rwandan Christians took part in the genocide that bloodied that nation in 1994. Professor Kay judges by an outward appearance which is not an adequate criterion for making moral distinctions. By his standard both the publican and sinner praying in the temple were justified. By his standard both the wheat and tares which grow in the Church from the beginning until the judgment will escape the fire. God alone judges the thoughts and intents of the heart, but He has given us His Word that provides us a standard for knowing them by their fruits. Do those who stand and pray bear the good fruits of repentance from evil deeds, confession of Christ as Lord, caring for the poor and naked, visiting the prisoners, and living a holy life? We cannot judge by fruits infallibly, but what a man says and does testifies eloquently to what is in his heart. And when his deeds and words do not square with apostolic teaching, with the faith once for all delivered to the saints, he exposes his heart as corrupt.

Professor Adam deserves credit for daring to apply his standard of constancy in relationships to the practice of divorce and subsequent remarriage which have been tacitly accepted in the mainline church. This practice comes in for scrutiny under Professor Adam's principle: God does not care about the sex of the person with whom we have sex, but He does care about the quality of the relationship, which must mirror His faithfulness to us. The issue of divorce and remarriage desperately needs to be addressed in the church, for the social consequences of it are devastating, and we should thank Professor Adam for raising it. There is, however, nothing I can discern in his criterion that would prohibit constancy in polyandry, polygamy, or an incestuous relationship begun by consenting adult relatives.

Professor McClain-Taylor clearly states that "homosexual practice in itself is not sinful", but he finds so much ambiguity in exegesis, particular Biblical texts, the concept of Scriptural authority, in scientific inquiry in general, in arguments from natural processes, in cross-cultural data, and in pathological studies that it is difficult to conceive on what basis he makes such an unambiguous statement.

Jesus said to His disciples on the mount: "Do not think that I am come to destroy the Law and the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." Professor Miller has made the most explicit argument for excising all the jots, tittles, and 'lesser' matters of the law which Jesus said would not pass away until heaven and earth pass. Let us be clear on what he says: the Decalogue is the core of the law. The rest of the laws give specific applications of the Decalogue. "But none of the specifics have the force of the original." Professor Miller is bold to make this statement and it certainly serves his purpose of legitimating the practice homosexuality in the pew and pulpit, but on what basis does he dismiss the words of the Son of God?

Given Jesus' words here and His general attitude towards the Old Testament as being spoken by God ('the Scripture

cannot be broken'), shouldn't our hermeneutical principle for determining which laws of the Old Testament are applicable to us be that we assume a particular law applies unless Jesus or an apostle clearly repeals it? For example, on the basis of Hebrews 10, the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament relating to animal sacrifices are null and void. Dietary laws may well be repealed on the basis of Matthew 15:17-20. Professor Miller and other contributors have yet to show how the law prohibiting sex between men stated twice in the Old Testament and reaffirmed and extended to women in the New is now null and void. Perhaps Jesus misspoke concerning the constancy of the law. In any case, has Christ delegated to the contributors of this volume the authority to annul one of the commands of His law?

At least one positive development has come of this debate, and that is the renewed attention to pastoral care for homosexuals. Professor Gillespie treats this issue in his article. The Church has been compelled to consider how she ministers to homosexuals or sinners of any kind. Many harmful and even hateful attitudes have been exposed which must be repented of and changed. True Christians welcome with open arms any who truly repent from their sins and confess Jesus Christ as Lord, submitting themselves to His authority. They lovingly but firmly encourage those who struggle with sin to grow in grace, faith, and freedom. Because of Christ's work, we are no longer slaves of sin that we should practice it. All of us struggle as we seek to grow in love and sanctification. What the church cannot do is embrace as brothers and sisters those who deny that what God calls sin is actually sin and who demand that their sin be affirmed as a good gift of God. This is to deny the Lordship of Jesus. This is to give the lie to any confession made with the lips. This amounts to calling good evil, and evil good. This is to undermine the very foundation upon which the distinctive Christian community is built.

Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of Professor Seow's book is that nine contributors are not only pleased to deny the authority of the unequivocal teaching and tradition of the early Church represented in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches today but also to effectively betray the Reformation. The denial is bad enough. Nine theologians who admit more questions and ambiguities than they have answers for, nevertheless claim a deeper understanding than the myriads of saints and martyrs who have gone before them. No matter. We are Protestants, after all, who have no obligation to the communion of saints—Chesterton's "democracy of the dead."

But if we are Protestants, we may readily charge our interlocutors with betraying the Reformation. Complementing the foundational Protestant doctrine of *sola Scriptura* is the doctrine of the perspicuity of the Scriptures. We no longer are taught this doctrine in seminary because it is too difficult for modern students to spell and pronounce. The doctrine simply stated is that the Scriptures are sufficiently clear in their teaching that anyone who can read them can understand what it necessary for salvation, that is, faith and life. These two doctrines took the Scriptures out of the hands of the priestly guild and put them into the hands of the laity.

Saint Athanasius concluded his famous treatise *On the Incarnation* with the words: "But for the searching of the

Scriptures and true knowledge of them an honorable life is needed, and a pure soul, and that virtue which is according to Christ; so that the intellect guiding its path by it, may be able to attain what it desires, and to comprehend it, in so far as it is accessible to human nature to learn concerning the Word of God. For without a pure mind and a modeling of the life after the saints a man could not possibly comprehend the words of the saints." Knowing something of the lives of a number of our writers, I cannot say that I trust their intellect to have gained a true knowledge of the Scriptures or to understand the words of the saints. If forced to choose between our modern theologians and exegetes and the saints of the past, I shall take my stand with the holy fathers of the past whose words have stood the test of centuries. But when I read the clever words of our professors, all I can think about are God's words answering Job out of the whirlwind: "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?"

Evangelicalism & the Future of Christianity

• by Alister McGrath, InterVarsity Press, 1995.
reviewed by Gregory E. Valeriano

Alasdair MacIntyre has suggested that a sign of a healthy tradition is its constant dialogue with itself, struggling to define what it means to be this tradition. If the latest proliferation of books on the state of evangelicalism is any sign, it seems that, by MacIntyre's criteria, evangelicalism is in tip top shape. Or is it?

Alister McGrath's latest book on evangelicalism, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity* presents itself as a critical but optimistic look at the state of American and British evangelicalism as they approach the third millennium. In this review I will be addressing McGrath's assessment of American evangelicalism.

According to McGrath, the future looks bright for evangelicalism. He describes evangelicalism as a "high octane faith in which head and heart are brought together in a movement which is looking forward to the future with a sense of expectancy and anticipation." Indeed, according to McGrath, evangelicalism "may hold the key to the future of Western Christianity." These are strong and optimistic words for a movement that has only recently re-emerged into the public and academic arena.

However, McGrath is not without argument. He, as well as many within mainline denominations, has correctly pointed out that mainline churches and their liberal theology are fading quickly. The mainline church has sold its soul and the gospel to modernity and secularization, leaving nothing behind but a residue of vague spirituality. Evangelicalism, on the other hand, has held fast to the Gospel and orthodoxy and, at the same time, made the Gospel attractive to those outside the church without compromising its truthfulness. For McGrath, this is the strength and catalyst which will propel evangelicalism into the third millennium.

Though McGrath has much that is positive to say, possibly too much, he does warn evangelicals of tendencies that could undermine the strength of evangelicalism. He

argues that one of the strengths of evangelicalism is its theological diversity and strong belief in C.S. Lewis's idea of "mere Christianity." In turn, he argues against those who wish to "tighten" evangelicalism theologically, thus excluding those from the evangelical fold who are truly evangelical. But is this really an immediate concern? The problem with modern evangelicalism is not that it is overly concerned with theology but that it has too little concern for it. David Wells argues in *No Place for Truth or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?*, that evangelicals, through a process of accommodation to modernity, have become increasingly theologically illiterate. Even more condemning, Wells states that evangelicals have stressed a modern brand of subjectivistic pietism that makes the cognitive aspect of evangelicalism irrelevant. In short, evangelicals have lost interest in doctrinal concerns.

Wells is not the only one lamenting the current state of evangelicalism. Mark Noll in his book, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, takes evangelicals to task over their lack of concern for thinking Christianly about the world. The scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is no evangelical mind. Noll does not contribute this scandal to an accommodation to modernity as much as to evangelicalism's inability to shirk some theological tenets of fundamentalism (i.e., dispensationalism, holiness spirituality and Pentecostalism) which wreak havoc on the evangelical mind. McGrath critiques fundamentalism for being too other-worldly and anti-intellectual and unwilling to concern itself with exploring how Christianity relates to culture and social life in general. Yet this is exactly Noll's critique of modern evangelicalism. For example, Noll points out that the "Christian fascination with the end of the world has existed for a very long time, but also that recent evangelical fixation on such matters — where contemporary events are labeled with great confidence as the fulfillment of biblical prophecy heralding the end time — has been particularly intense." For those who doubt the continuing domination of this way of thinking, Noll reminds us of the stream of runaway best sellers during the Gulf War attempting to interpret the latest Middle East crisis as the direct fulfillment of biblical prophecy. Rather than study what was going on in the Middle East, they featured a kind of apocalyptic Bible study that drew attention away from careful analysis of the complexities of the Middle Eastern culture.

Though McGrath is not as critical of the evangelical mind as Noll, he does cast a critical eye upon evangelicalism pointing out its "dark side". However, one still gets the impression that he is too optimistic about its future. His prediction that it will "continue to grow numerically in the next generation and will achieve a still greater academic, social and political significance", is indeed quite optimistic. This confidence is puzzling, if Wells is right, in that the "vast growth in evangelically minded people in the 60's, 70's and 80's should by now have revolutionized American culture. The results should by now be unmistakable. Secular values should be reeling, and those who are their proponents should be very troubled. But as it turns out, all this swelling of the evangelical ranks has passed unnoticed in the culture." If this is true, what makes McGrath think that the future of evangelicalism will fair any differently?

One of the disconcerting aspects of McGrath's critical analysis of evangelicalism is that there is very little criticism in his analysis. Wells launches a devastating critique of American evangelicalism through a penetrating analysis of evangelicalism and American culture. Yet McGrath neither engages in such an analysis nor pays much heed to the criticisms of Wells. For McGrath to give an honest appraisal of modern evangelicalism he must grapple with criticisms of Wells (and Noll). The fact that he chose not to is an indictment of his over all argument because these criticisms are substantial if not devastating.

Despite these weak aspects of McGrath's analysis, there is much to offer in this book. He gives a good review of the history of evangelicalism and its Reformed heritage. He challenges evangelicals to learn from this history, thus asking them to do something that is quite un-evangelical. He also calls on evangelicals to gain a better understanding of spirituality and their spiritual heritage. By asking evangelicals to learn from their history and heritage, McGrath is asking evangelicals to drop their anti-traditional mentality. Given that bad habits are hard to break this is no easy request.

In the end one is not convinced, or is at least somewhat suspicious, of McGrath's optimism. His analysis of evangelicalism seems weak and his optimism a bit too much. However, in order to gain an better understanding of the state of evangelicalism one would do well to read McGrath's book in conjunction with Noll's *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* and Wells's *No Place for Truth*. His book is an important voice in the discussion of evangelicalism and its future.

Paul: Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity

- by David Wenham, Eerdmans, 1995.
reviewed by Chad C. Pecknold

Rudolf Bultmann determined that Paul knew very little about the Jesus tradition — or at least didn't pay much attention to it — and in this sense considered the Apostle Paul to be the great innovator of Christianity. Ever since Wilhelm Wrede's *Paulus* (2nd ed., 1907), New Testament scholarship has largely conceded a clear division between Jesus and Paul: Jesus was a wandering Jewish prophet; Paul was the real founder of Christianity. While this division has been negotiated in many ways, few have taken on these assumptions as squarely as has David Wenham. His recent book represents one of the most informed, fresh and comprehensive investigations currently available. Wenham offers an alternative to all who have been unsatisfied by the artificial divisions between the life and teachings of Jesus and Pauline thought.

Professor Wenham is currently lecturer in New Testament at Wycliffe Hall and is on the Faculty of Theology of Oxford University. He takes a long hard look at this well entrenched paradigm of division and finds it wanting. Over a broad range of issues, focusing on seven subjects (i.e., the Kingdom of God, Jesus' own self-consciousness, his death, the community of faith, ethics, the future, and the life story of Jesus) Wenham searches for

conceptual similarity between the worldviews of Jesus and Paul on a given view while also assessing the probability of influence from Jesus to Paul.

Wenham's final chapter offers a helpful overview. He recognizes that the debate about Paul's dependence on Jesus necessarily involves him in the debate over what can be known about the *historical Jesus*. Despite the associated difficulties, Wenham carefully argues that Paul did live and work as an apostle under the influence of the teachings of Jesus. In fact, Wenham claims "massive" similarities between Paul and Jesus.

Wenham is convinced (and is convincing) that Paul is familiar with such things as the last supper and some of the passion narrative, Jesus' prohibition of divorce, his missionary discourse as found in Mark 6, his eschatological discourse as found in Matthew 24, Jesus' words on non-retaliation and love, and Jesus' use of *Abba*. Wenham is also moderately convinced that Paul is familiar with Jesus' baptism by John, the commissioning of Peter as the Rock, the transfiguration, the parables of the sower and those sayings of Jesus that concern judging others and causing them to stumble.

Wenham's conclusion is that Paul was a faithful disciple and follower of Jesus, even in the face of his own unique developments, and was not the wholesale innovator that has often been imagined in New Testament scholarship in the last century. The significant union between the Jesus and Pauline traditions needs to be heard and Wenham's treatment is a first-rate contribution that is also readable, and even popular at points. That is to say, it will engage the undergraduate as easily as it engages the graduate or professional. This book is lucid and clear. Professor Wenham presents an argument that seems obvious yet fills a tremendous lacuna in modern New Testament scholarship.

The Scriptural Doctrine of the Love of God (*Presbyterian and Reformed Review*, 1902) Geerhardus Vos

The love of God occupies a more prominent place than any other divine attribute in present-day Christian consciousness. Obviously the causes of this prominence must not be sought in the sphere of doctrinal thinking, but in certain practical tendencies of our modern religious life. Not for the sake of its theological significance as a constituent factor in the divine character, but for the sake of its bearing upon human conduct and destiny has the love of God been exalted to this position of supremacy among its sister-attributes. It were idle to pretend that the scientific theology of to-day is more successful than the theology of previous ages in deducing from the one principle of love everything that Scripture and experience teach concerning God's method of dealing with His creatures. On the contrary, to the thinking mind the impossibility of doing this has perhaps never stood out more clearly than it stand out at present, in the light of what Biblical research has shown to be the truth of revelation, and of what modern science has

shown to be the reality of life. And yet, in the very face of this impossibility, there has developed a widespread demand that God's love, and nothing but His love shall be made the keynote of every message Christianity has to bring to the world.

The shifting of the emphasis in religion from the intellect to the will and the emotions has undoubtedly had something to do with producing this result. So long as the intellect retained its legitimate place among the functions of the religious subject, so long as to know God was felt to be an essential part of glorifying God, the natural tendency was to make this knowledge as comprehensive and many-sided as possible—to have it mirror the full content of the divine nature, and not merely a single one of its perfections. Whatever may be charged against the intellectualism of the period when orthodoxy reigned supreme, it can claim credit at least for having been broad-minded and well-balanced in its appreciation of the infinite complexity and richness of the life of God. The music of that theology may not always please modern ears, because it seems lacking in its sweetness; but it ranged over a wider scale and made better harmonies than the popular strains of to-day. On the other hand, it is plain that, where the religious interest is exclusively concentrated upon the will, and entirely exhausts itself in attempts at solving the concrete, practical problems of life, no strong incentive will exist for reflecting upon any other aspect of the nature of God than His love, because all that is required of God is that He shall serve as the norm and warrant for Christian philanthropic effort. It is a well-known fact that all heresy begins with being a partial truth. So it is in the present case. No one will deny that in the Scriptural disclosure of truth the divine love is set forth as a most fundamental principle, nor that the embodiment of this principle in our human will and action forms a prime ingredient of that subjective religion which the Word of God requires of us. But is quite possible so to over-emphasize this one side of truth and duty as to bring into neglect other exceedingly important principles and demands of Christianity. The result will be that, while no positive error is taught, yet the equilibrium both in consciousness and life is disturbed and a condition created in which the power of resistance to the inroads of spiritual disease is greatly reduced. There can be little doubt that in this manner the onesidedness and exclusiveness with which the love of God has been preached to the present generation is largely responsible for that universal weakening of the sense of sin, and the consequent decline of interest in the doctrines of atonement and justification, which even in orthodox and evangelical circles we all see and deplore.

But this by no means reveals the full extent of the danger to which the tendency we are speaking of has exposed us. It is impossible for any practical displacement of the balance of truth to continue for a long time without endeavoring to perpetuate and justify itself by means of a corresponding reconstruction of the entire doctrinal system. Thus what may have been at first no more than a matter of relative emphasis inevitably tends to become a question of positive theoretical error, such as makes the return to normal conditions in practical religious life more difficult than before. In the Ritschlian theology we have before us the systematic expression of all the various currents and

tendencies which have now for a considerable time been carrying the Christian spirit of our age in the direction just pointed out. Here the primacy of the love of God and the restriction of religion to the sphere of the will have ceased to be abnormalities of an unevenly distributed development. They have become the supreme maxims, clearly realized and systematically upheld, to whose sway the religious consciousness in its whole extent is made absolutely subject. Ritschlianism is the application of the principle of empiricism to the sphere of theological knowledge, and that in its extreme positivistic form. Not what God has objectively and supernaturally revealed to us concerning Himself, but only that which can enter into our subject religious experience, forms the proper content of theology. Under the reproach of being metaphysical, all that the Church has hitherto believed concerning the Triune existence of God, concerning his transcendental attributes, concerning the preexistence and incarnation of Christ, and many other vital facts, is ruled out of her creed. Well-nigh the whole of what used to be considered the solid substance of our knowledge of God is thus declared, not simply of secondary importance, but, so far as our apprehension is concerned, impossible and non-existent. By such radical reduction of the claims of the intellect to nothing, the way is made clear for the enthronement of the will as the sovereign organ through which the knowledge of God is obtained. For, if for knowing God we are shut up to our subjective experience, how else can His revelation enter into our consciousness except in the form of loving will? This is the only mode of the divine existence that we can actually reproduce, and consequently apprehend without falling back upon the discredited method of metaphysical speculation. From the standpoint of this theology the proposition, God is love, assumes the literal meaning that everything we know of Him is but one of the many formulas in which His love may be expressed, according to the several relations it sustains to us. As Schleiermacher transformed all the divine attributes into so many forms of causality, in accordance with his principle that religion is a feeling of absolute dependence, so in the Ritschlian system the old names for the attributes are, to be sure, retained, but the reality designated by these names is in each case reduced to terms of love. No road leads out of this moral circle to which our cognition of God is confined. Omnipotence is defined as the love of God, which is able to assist Him against every enemy. Omnipresence signifies that His love can help everywhere and under all circumstances. Eternity expresses the assurances that not for a single moment does God cease to cherish love for us. Righteousness means the consistency wherewith God's love pursues the goal of our salvation. In the same manner the entire rich complex of the world of redemption, which the Scriptures call the kingdom of God, is forced within the limits of such moral relationships as the divine love prescribes for us. The kingdom of God is identical with the moral order of the world. What Christ came to reveal is the Fatherhood of God, not in any Trinitarian sense, but exclusively as a moral and religious fact; and, corresponding to this, the Sonship of Christ can have no other content than that the experience of the love of God attained in Him its ideal perfection.

WHAT IS ORTHODOXY?

A Call for Papers for the Fall 1996 Apologetics Seminars of the **Charles Hodge Society**

The theme for the fall 1996 Princeton Apologetics Seminars will be orthodoxy as summarized by the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds. We would like papers defending the central themes of the Christian faith. Please send paper or two-three hundred word abstract summarizing the argument for an essay on the relevant subject. It should defend the truth the doctrine considered against a specific *contemporary challenge*. If chosen, your paper will be scheduled for a fall meeting of the Apologetics Seminars, with a respondent. We encourage *all* interested students, faculty, administration to submit abstracts, in an effort to establish a real basis for Christian unity at Princeton Theological Seminary. We also welcome submissions from those outside Princeton Theological Seminary.

Please send proposals to Jay Wesley Richards, Princeton Theological Seminary, SBN 372, P.O. Box 821, Princeton, NJ 08542-0803, by **August 1, 1996**. We are still accepting proposals under the following general rubrics:

- ◆ God the Almighty Creator
- ◆ The Humanity and Divinity of Christ
- ◆ The Suffering Atonement of Christ
 - ◆ The Resurrection of Christ
- ◆ The Lordship and Judgment of Christ
 - ◆ The Universal Church
 - ◆ Salvation and Everlasting Life
- ◆ The Reality and Presence of the Holy Spirit

Thank you,

The Charles Hodge Society

(continued from p. 24)

Paradoxical though this absorption of all other attributes into the one trait of love may be, it is but the consistent carrying out of the principle which underlies every practical tendency to ignore the Scriptural law of proportion in dealing with the divine character. There is, however, still another serious defect to be noticed in this modern exploitation of the love of God, touching not the distinction of love from the other attributes, but the internal distinction between the various kinds and degrees of affection, which in the case of a relationship so infinitely varied as that of God to the world are subsumed under the comprehensive term of love. The old theology was exceedingly careful in marking off these kinds and degrees from one another, and in assigning to each the group of objects upon which it operates. The primordial love which is exchanged between the three Persons of the adorable Trinity was distinguished from the ectypical love which goes out toward the creature. Within the latter, the general benevolence extending toward all sentient beings was separated from the specific affection God cherishes for intelligent beings made in His image. Terms like *philoktisia* and *philanthropia* were employed in order to facilitate the proper recognition of these lines of distinction. And again, within the limits of the divine affection for angels and men, notice was taken of the difference necessarily created by the physical, moral, and spiritual conditions under which the love of God finds and contemplates its objects. Above all, the supreme soteriological manifestation of this love, rising in its absoluteness and sovereignty above every possibility

of being either originated or checked or extinguished by aught in the creature, and particularly belonging to the sphere of the elect, was upheld in its uniqueness over against all other manifestations of a conditioned and more common character. It needs but a glance at the average presentation of the same subject to-day, whether in popular or more scientific form, to observe that these distinctions are entirely neglected. A dull uniformity has taken the place of the wealth of form and color that used to delight the eye, not merely of the theologian, but of the simple Christian also, because both recognized in it a reflection of the infinite fullness of life in God. Thus the watchword, God is love, has not only silenced all other voices from the realm of truth, it has likewise rendered many incapable of appreciating broad distinctions in a matter where even the most delicate shadings are of importance. And, as valuation depends largely upon a well-developed sense for the specific difference of one's possessions and privileges, it is to be feared that, in consequence of this leveling process, the consciousness of the saving love of God no longer possesses for the Christian to-day quite the same preciousness it used to possess for believers of past generations. Not only this, but objectively also in the same degree as the extent of its sphere of application has been enlarged, the content of the divine love has been impoverished and depleted. The message has become one which bears the same meaning for all, but it seems less worth carrying than it did before.

Vos spends the next thirty pages considering what the Old and New Testaments say on the matter of God's love.

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